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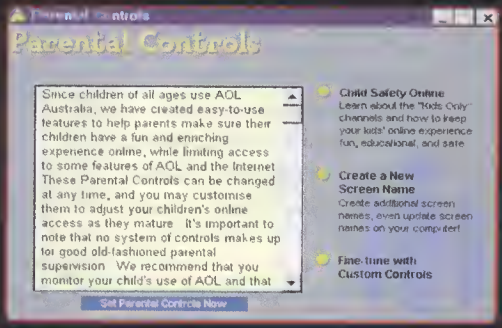

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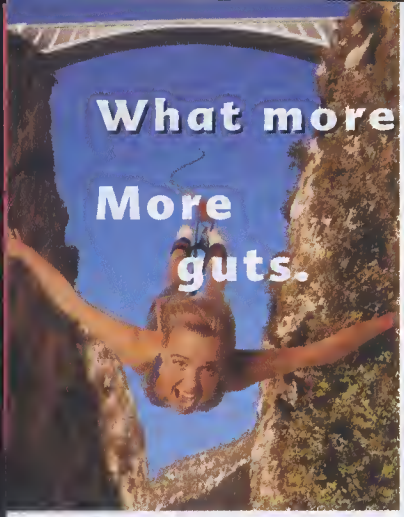

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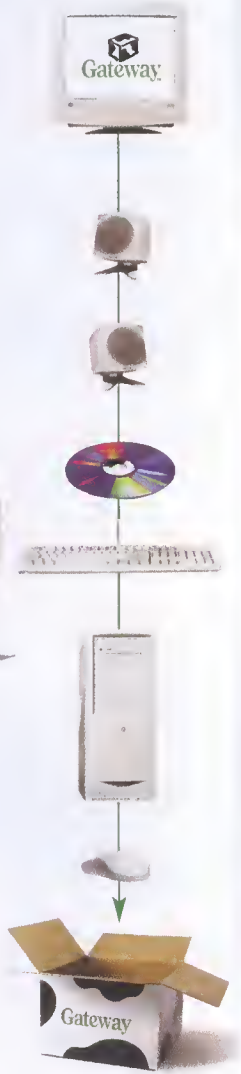

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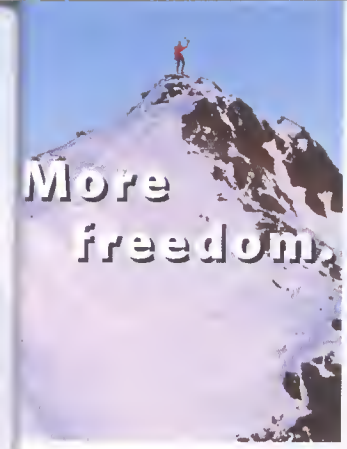

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ISSUE 04 | MAY 1999

REGULARS

Mail Box | 10
Birthday back issues

News Wire | 14
Alston targets porn

ISP News | 20
Optus, Ozemail pricing

Reviews | 22
RIO MP3 player

Shareware | 24
Organising with MyFiles

Net Trends | 67
Shopping Online

E-commerce | 88
Breaking down the walls

Net Celeb | 92
James Morrison's big jam

Net Directory | 96
Get wired with this lot

Offline | 98
Tropical Cyclone Alston

HOW TO

Newbies | 59
Secure servers

Web Design | 62
Start learning

Help Desk | 94
Outlook problems

WHERE TO

Far Fetched | 65
Ain't misbehavin'

Shopping Guide | 66
Credit card fever

Top Fifty | 69
Olympics to pet dogs

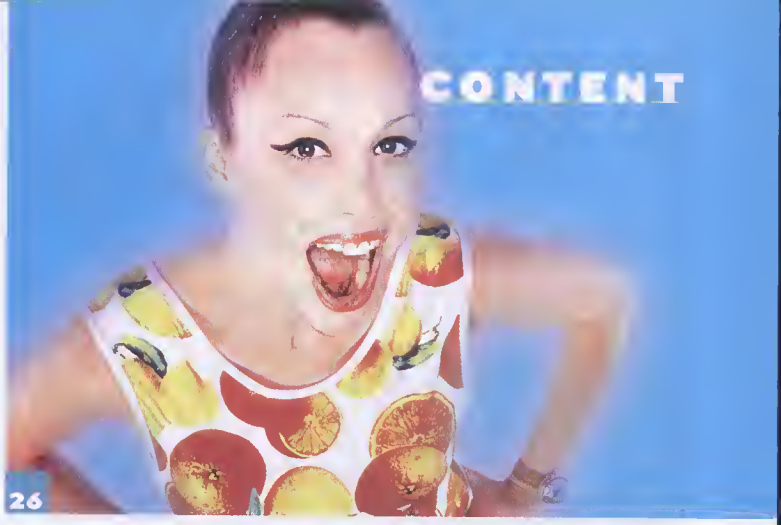
Site of the Month | 84
Melbourne's three great zoos

Site Watch | 85
East Timor on the brink

Live Events | 86
Happenin' thangs...

We'll be back in June...
If you're lacking romance in your life, make sure you catch this issue of NetGuide. We find the best ways to make contact with the opposite sex online. You'll discover the best things in life are free in our Top 10 Shareware feature and get the scoop on the best Internet telephony software to make cheap calls with. We also examine the world of alternative operating systems.

CONTENT



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TUTORIAL

Let's chat

Learn how to get social on the Net using IRC, from selecting a server to saying what you mean. | **26**

FEATURES

Alien at my table

The hunt for the paranormal goes on as we discover the hidden cyberspace X-Files. Let science fiction sites scream down your phone line. | **34**

Keeping kids safe

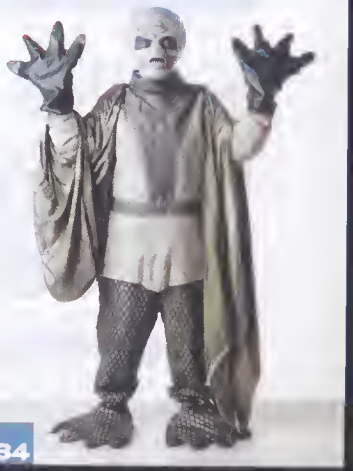
Make the Net a safe place for children to use. We expose the risks and suggest solutions to ensure your child has fun online. | **40**

Cocktails and dreams

Celebrate NetGuide's birthday issue with a celebratory drink. We test a variety of sites to help you mix cocktails and order online. | **46**

Making digital meetings

Video conferencing offers a cheap way to be seen and heard across the other side of the world. We review a range of software. | **52**



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FROM THE EDITOR

WELCOME TO THE BIRTHDAY issue of the Australian NetGuide. For a year now in our new format, we've been providing tutorials, news, reviews, sites and commentary on an industry that is ever changing. It's been an exciting time for the team and we would like to thank our readers for their support. We value the feedback we get and use it as the most important yardstick for our continued success. Please keep your comments and suggestions coming in.

To mark the year milestone we're offering readers five chances to win free Internet access with Telstra BigPond for a year (see page 91). The winners will really be able to enjoy this month's Top 50, which starts with Olympics sites.

In this celebratory issue we teach you how to use Internet Chat Relay. It's a great way to interact with people the world over with similar interests. And as the federal government looks to clean up the Internet through regulation and classification of pornographic and offensive sites, we give you a head start, exposing the risks and offering the best solutions to keep your children safe.

On the zany side, discover the many X-Files hidden on the Internet in our science fiction feature. The truth is out there in cyberspace. To keep NetGuide's birthday party merry, read ahead and learn where to order and how to mix your favourite drinks. We also rate a variety of video conferencing software on market so you can make digital meetings.

Sadly, this issue marks the end of an era for our graphic layout artist, Camille Neilson, who will be missed. We welcome Chilo Elinon to the position.

Looking forward to the year ahead,

Daniel Fallon
EDITOR

Mailbox

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Good idea

Firstly, would like to say I love your magazine and have been reading the last two issues. I remember the March letter of the month was talking about the possibilities of *NetGuide* offering an award for Great Personal Web sites. That is a great idea and I hope it takes off. / **George Kartanakis**

Design applications

Has *NetGuide* done any comparison reviews on Web design programs? I am in the process of designing my own home page (on paper) and would like to know what is the best (easiest) WYSIWYG program to do this. I have heard that FrontPage 98 is pretty good for the home user, though I feel it might be based around Internet Explorer too much and I prefer Netscape [browsers]. / **Chas Bullock**

See our Web design package review on p38 of the April issue. / Ed

Navigator query

How do I clear the record of all the sites that I've visited? I have clicked: 'Edit / Preferences', 'Navigator', 'Clear history button', 'Cache' in the advance section, 'Clear memory cache' and 'Clear disk cache'. However, this doesn't work. When I click the 'clear history button' I don't get an error message. What I get is a message box that reads, 'This will clear the list of pages you have previously visited. Continue?' / **Shane Clements**

This is the correct process for clearing both the site history and the cache from your browser. Just click 'Okay'. / Ed

Buid-A-Style

Thanks for the small review [of Build-A-Style] at **www.buildata.com.au** in the latest edition under *Netcool*. Unfortunately the double 'dd' in the address was not correct. Keep up the good mag. I would love to see an industry Web designer spot, like 'the world according to' and his/her background ideas on what's cool. / **Steve Manning**

Eat your greens

Those Net shoppers outside the Sydney area who cannot purchase from Woolworths or Greengrocer on line may want to try shopping at **www.thegreenline.com.au**. The Green Line home delivers organic fruit, vegetables and grocery items within Victoria on Thursdays and Fridays. The site has a reasonable range of groceries, although the range of goods on offer fluctuates with the seasons — not everything grows all year round without heavy-duty chemical assistance. / **Andrea Tappe**

Free job ads

Your *NetNews* article on free job classifieds (*NetGuide*, April issue)

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claimed Free4all "is the first Internet service to offer free classifieds to employers, job seekers and recruitment agencies in Australia". Well they weren't. For over three years (since January '96 in fact) Australia's Careers OnLine (COL) (**www.careersonline.com.au**) has been offering something much better. With around 6,500 people visiting Careers OnLine every week, we've got a lot of people using the Internet looking for jobs, using COL's many helpful bits and pieces to help them explore their future. Almost 1,000 of these job seekers have placed notices on Careers OnLine seeking work. Disappointingly, we only have around 100 vacancies current — a figure we'd love Australian employers to add to. So let's send out a challenge to Aussie employers to use the Net to find new staff. I love your mag and look forward to getting my copy every month. / **Stephen Spry**

If you read a little closer you'll see Free4all's Michael Soker says the site is the first Internet service to offer free classifieds. Please feel free to send in figures and facts about COL though. / Ed

Letter of the month

I'm a bit of a late starter concerning purchasing my own home computer package, but I finally have and instantly got myself an Internet Service Provider. I don't know much at all about the Net but after browsing in news agencies for some magazines I finally purchased your *NetGuide* and have found it really helpful, informative and easy to read for a layperson like myself; and all at a very reasonable cost compared to other mags. I am curious as to how long you have been in publication and where I may be able to put my hands on some back copies. Naturally, I look forward to purchasing future copies and look forward to "getting right into it". Keep up the good work and thanks. / **Lyn Pagram**

This is our birthday issue – so we've been around one year in this format. There are a limited number of back issues available for $5 each, including postage. / Ed

Easter Javascript

Firstly, in your April 1999 issue I was interested in the popup window for Easter. This made my page more colourful and enjoyable. Is it possible to include some more of these scripts in your next issue? And secondly, I was searching for the code to make invisible frames on my page, but it was very difficult. Could you include some easy HTML in your next issue for this? By the way, I think your magazine is a great example for future magazines and a great reference for readers of all ages. / **Bill Hanley**

We've started a new series on designing a Web site in our web design column, beginning with the basics and heading into more complicated manoeuvres. Get on board. / Ed

Great resource

I would like to congratulate you on your magazine and Web site. They have been great resources for me when I am surfing. / **David Scott**

LETTER OF THE MONTH receives a prize pack from the Quicken.com.au Investment centre. The pack includes a polo shirt, mont blanc style pen and copy of the Quicken Deluxe program (package valued at $150)

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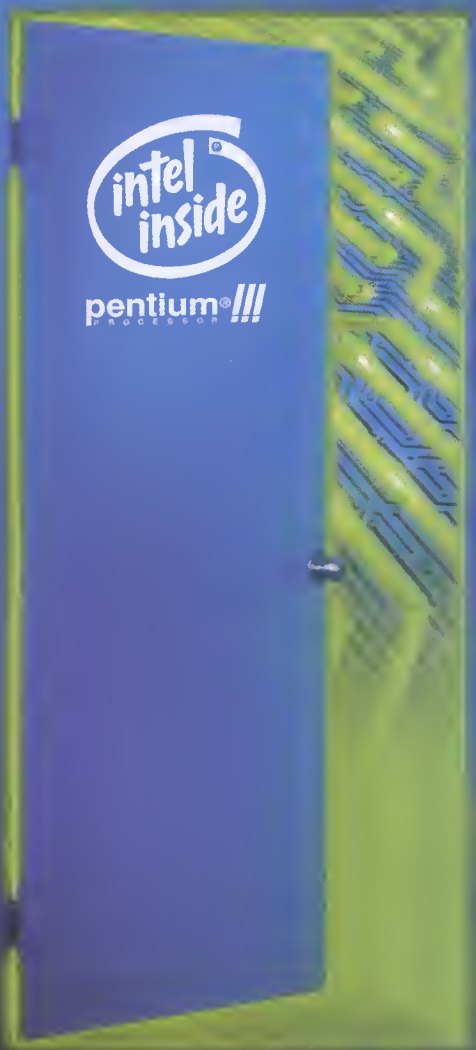


www.intel.com.au

Net news
GLOBAL AND LOCAL

Yahoo! Movies

Yahoo! Australia & NZ has launched Yahoo! Movies (**movies.yahoo.com.au**), a free service dedicated to helping people find out the latest movie information online. Yahoo! teamed up with movie information providers Urban Cinefiles (**www.urbancinefile.com.au**) and Imovie (**www.imovie.com.au**) to develop the service, which features screening times, reviews, entertainment news, movie clubs, chat and links to local and international sites. The site should provide a valuable resource for movie-goers Australia wide, says Yahoo! senior producer Alan Jones.

Webmaster's school

Australia's Web masters can gain recognition of their skills and knowledge by completing the Certified Internet Webmaster (CIW) program. Delivered by Computer Power Advanced Systems, part of education and training organisation Computer Power Group (**www.cpg.com.au**), the CIW program was devised by US-based Prosoft Training.com (**www.prosofttraining.com**).

Microsoft releases IE 5

Software giant Microsoft (**www.microsoft.com/australia/**) has launched Internet Explorer 5 (IE 5), the newest version on its Web browser. The company has incorporated its IntelliSense technology to simplify and automate tasks in the browser, such as spell checks, entering URL forms and searching for related sites. Among Version 5.0's features, a new Windows Radio Toolbar has been included to help surfers tune into radio stations around the world. The browser lets users listen to live (or on-demand) streaming audio while surfing. A related links facility driven by Web services company Alexa (**www.alexa.com**) has also been included in the release. When activated, a sidebar provides sites relevant to the content at the current location the user is visiting. The browser supports popular design coding, Dynamic HTML and Extensible and Extensible Markup Language (XML).

The IE 5 beta received positive feedback from testers, according to Internet Explorer Product Manager Tony Wilkinson. "We know that customers who used the Internet Explorer 5 beta noticed significant improvements in their browsing experience. In fact in a recent Microsoft survey, over 93% of respondents stated that they were satisfied with the new simplicity features and found them directly relevant to their daily browsing needs." Surfers can download IE 5 for free from Microsoft (**www.microsoft.com/windows/ie**).

Fairfax makes rugbyheaven

Rugby Union fans can catch up with the latest rugby action at Fairfax's new rugbyheaven (**www.rugbyheaven.com.au**). Publishing houses from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa have joined forces to provide fans with an extensive resource featuring international rugby news and information. Visitors to the site will be able to access match reports, game analysis, expert commentary and tips. Editorial feeds from *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The New Zealand Herald* and *The Independent Group* in South Africa will keep fans up-to-date with the state of play. The rubgyheaven launch coincides with the beginning of the Super 12 season.

Alston targets porn

Communications and Information Technology Minister Richard Alston has come under attack from Internet industry groups for proposing new measures to block the access to porn sites. Under new laws, Internet Service Providers (ISP) will have to pull the plug on porn content they hosted. The Australian Broadcasting Authority (**www. aba.gov.au**) will become a watchdog for the new laws, listening to complaints from surfers and instructing service providers to remove or block offensive content. ISPs will not be liable for content deemed unsuitable, but they will be responsible for removing highly offensive or illegal material from their services once they have been notified of the existence of the material. The government will also establish a community/industry body to monitor online material, receive complaints about offensive material from the public and educate surfers about possible solutions such as filtering products.

The implication of ISPs blocking porn content, especially from overseas, poses serious problems, according to Internet Industry Association (**www.aiia.com.au**) chairman Patrick Fair. "Taken literally, the Government's statements would require Internet Service Providers to set up gateways to the Internet at our borders and check the content of all sites coming into the country." However, ISPs would not have to block international content, according to government spokesperson Terry O'Connor.

Ninemsn turns one

Growing Internet portal Ninemsn (**ninemsn.com.au**) has turned one, marking the end of a year in which the Microsoft, PBL partnership pushed Web impressions up to 100 million per month, 40% of which are direct to content sites. The portal has also announced a partnership with local technology retailer Harris Technology (**www.ht.com.au**) to sell computer hardware and software online. The agreement with Harris Technology is part of the portal's new online shopping strategy, and follows a similar partnership agreement with US book retailer, Barnes & Noble. Ninemsn's new shopping strategy falls into place after the recent launch of CarPoint (**carpoint .ninemsn.com.au**), a consumer service which helps surfers choose and purchase new and used cars.

E-Store opens

Online computer shopfront E-Store (**www.estore.com.au**) has opened its doors to the cyber-public. The new site offers consumers more than 30,000 computer products. Cost savings from the specialised online computer store model are likely to be passed onto customers, according to E-Store managing director Steven Spilly. "Online shopping is an emerging market in which customers enjoy substantial savings through elimination of retailers' expensive overheads. We can guarantee Australia's lowest prices."

Cyberpoetry

Experimedia, the multimedia division of the State Library of Victoria, has launched a cyberpoetry site at **www .experimedia.vic. gov.au/ cyberpoet**. Melbourne-born poet Komninos Zervos has developed the site as part of his ten week cyberpoet residency. The ten-week project, cyber poet@slv, is the first to be supported by Arts Victoria's Incubator, a program that encourages artists to explore the creative possibilities of multimedia technology.

Netnews
GLOBAL AND LOCAL

Columbia Tristar

US based film company Columbia Tristar (**www.columbiatristarfilms.com.au**) Pictures now has a local site. Visitors will be able to read about movies currently being shown on the big screen as well as upcoming releases. The site also features information about its Art House program for supporting low-budget, specialised films such as The Usual Suspects. There are also interviews with film-makers.

Budget law

Surfers can get divorce papers, wills and other legal documents from a new online law service. Legalmart (**www.legalmart.com.au**) has been launched to make legal processes easier for consumers to access and use from home. Surfers can get a divorce paper for $100 or purchase a will for $50 by their credit card.

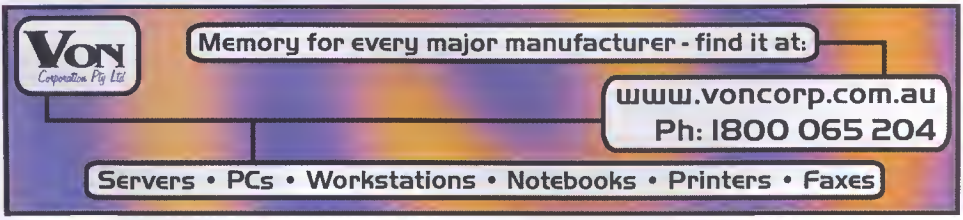
Flourish Flowers' e-commerce

Sydney's Flourish Flower Merchants has a new e-commerce offering at **www.flourish.com.au**. The site allows visitors to order flower arrangements and hampers — which include salts, soaps gels, creams — online. It features a 'virtual shop walkthrough' using Quick Time 3.0 software, which lets customers browse through the store from their computer. Customers can use online forms and the normal credit card options to order flowers, hampers and even book a consultation to discuss wedding arrangements. The store is targeting the time-challenged Web surfer, says Flourish proprietor Vanessa Rickard. "Our target market includes business executives and employees from large organisations who want to send flowers or gifts but simply don't have the time to visit our store."

OzSearch unveils portal

OzSearch Internet Guide (**www.ozsearch.com.au**) has repacked its site into an Australian focussed portal, offering a newly designed look and access to content such as local news and weather. The additional content will further encourage surfers to visit the site, which offers an Australian focussed directory search service, according to OzSearch managing director Kris Duggan. "By offering Australian Internet users easy access to Australian content and traffic, we are continually growing in terms of content and traffic."

The OzSearch search service is receiving more than 200,000 monthly page views, and serving over 3,000 visitors a day, according to officials.



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Netnews
GLOBAL AND LOCAL

CitySearch Canberra

Internet city guide CitySearch (**www.citysearch.com.au**) has launched its latest site in the nation's capital, Canberra. Residents and visitors will be able to use the site as a business, entertainment and communications guide in Canberra to find out the latest events in town and the best place to eat, shop, relax and party. In addition, users will be able to watch movie previews, read reviews and profiles of arts and entertainment in Canberra.

Infinitum catalogues

A new service aimed at providing small-to-medium sized businesses with the means to post their own e-commerce enabled site has kicked off. Axis Media Group's Infinitum (**www.infinitum.com.au**) offers a variety of hosting packages for businesses that want to draw customers online to buy from product catalogues. Users can build, edit and update their site via a Web browser, including placement of product content, images, graphics and logos.

Strathfield jives online

Car radio and mobile electronics retailer Strathfield Car Radios has revealed its plans to help educate its customers and increase its market-share with a new e-commerce site at **www.strathfield.com.au**. The site uses Net.Commerce Pro, IBM's (**www.ibm.com.au**) latest 'e-business' solution, to showcase products available through the retail chain. Visitors can choose and order from its line of mobile communications and home/office products, including mobile phones sold in conjunction with Telstra MobileNet plans. Customers can use key word and 'drill-down' search systems to find the plan or brand of phone that best suits them. Surfers can select the up-front, monthly minimum and term contract costs as a variable to their searches. Straithfield is trying to both educate its current customer-base and encourage easy and fast shopping at the Flash enhanced site, according to managing director of Strathfield Group Andrew Kelly. "Our aim is to make the online search and purchasing easy for the customer."

Youth get The Source

The Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs has built an offering to provide young people with information on Commonwealth programs and services. The Source (**www.thesource.gov.au**) has links to sites with information on jobs and careers, improving your skills, financial assistance when studying, youth networks, entertainment and social and consumer rights pages.

The site will also cover the latest news on the National Youth Roundtable, Youth Allowance and Young Australian of the Year Awards. Visitors can also comment on issues or policies and ask the government questions via an online form. The source will be an important resource for the growing number of young people online, according to the Minister for Employment, Education and Youth Affairs David Kemp. "The Source is a valuable navigation tool for young people trying to make sense of and use the huge amount of information available to them."

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eloan mortgages

Australia's first specialist Internet home loan lender was recently launched in Sydney. eloan (**www.eloan.com.au**) enables users to plan their home loan using a calculator and then apply for it online. The Adelaide-based company then puts through a phone call to finalise details of the loan, before a letter of agreement is sent to the recipient within 48 hours. Local valuers and solicitors are then used to complete the loan process. The company hopes to pass on cost savings generated by using the electronic loan service, offering a variable rate of 5.9% with no extra application or ongoing fees, according to eloan director Andrew Hodge. "The savings come from the lack of staff – we're not sending people out to interview for home loans...We have been empowered by the Internet to compete nationally in a larger market."

Customers will be able to go to a registered part of the site to check the status of their loan and transfer funds in and out of the loan via the Net. Security on the site includes 128-bit encryption and firewalls.

Nokia phone gets Net

Nokia (**www.nokia.com**) has released a mobile phone designed to enable easy access to Internet content. The Nokia 7110 dual band GSM 900/1800 phone is the first product to be based on the Wireless Application Protocol (WAP) in Mobile Media Mode (WWW:MMM). The phone has a large graphics display and a number of features for ease of operation and text input. Users of the product will be able to choose the optional WAP platform to receive services and content via the Internet, including banking, travel, entertainment booking and news. The product should be available in the second half of 1999. Meanwhile, Nokia has launched the 9110 Communicator, the second-generation product also featuring Net access and email features.

News compiled by Daniel Fallon (neted@netguide.aust.com)

Vector Zone

Web design software producer Macromedia has created the Vector Zone (**www.vectorzone.com**), a vector graphics resource for Web developers. The site provides information about vector graphics technologies and standards, and the benefits of vectors for the Web. Vector Zone features articles, interviews and technical pointers for both novice and professional Web developers.

Coles Myer

Retail superstore giant Coles Myer (**www.coles.com.au**) has announced plans it will be trialing an online food ordering service in Melbourne later this year. The company has a licensing agreement with US company Peapod to use its online grocery shopping systems. The Peapod system is used in partnerships with food retailers in the US to provide online services to over 70,000 households.

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ISP news

Optus pricing options

Cable & Wireless Optus (**www.optusnet.com.au**) has announced a new Internet pricing structure to provide for the variety of users accessing the Net. The 'NetSaver' access service has an entry level $10 fee, which includes four hours of usage per month after which an hourly rate applies that reduces with usage. In addition, a $70 cap applies for up to 200 hours access per month under this entry plan. More frequent uses can choose to pay $20 for 10 hours, $35 for 20 hours or $45 for 200 hours of access. The graded pricing structure breaks the inflexibility of other pricing plans in the marketplace, according to Cable & Wireless Optus' multimedia manager Chris Weston. "The Internet market has changed significantly over the past year. Customers are looking for simple packages and a pricing structure which offers them the flexibility to use the Internet without watching the clock."

In conjunction with the new pricing structure, Optus Internet is offering Internet tools in Families and Small Business packages. The bundles include five email addresses, the resources to create a Web page and the capability to personalise a homepage.

OzEmail cuts access costs

OzEmail (**www.ozemail.com.au**) has changed its pricing structure in a bid to encourage higher usage. It is now offering its OzMegaSaver pricing plan for $34.95 to give users up to 150 hours online. The pricing plan is available in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and a number of selected regional locations. Strong competition in the service provider market has driven the prices down for consumers, according to OzEmail CEO Sean Howard. "This year customers will reap the benefits of this intense competition and today I'm pleased to announce a 22% reduction in the price of our most popular pricing plan."

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Reviews

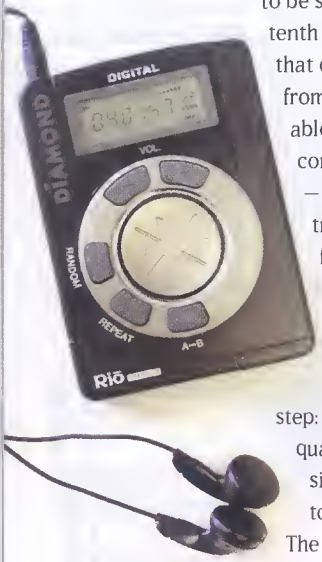
Rio PMP300

Available from Caulfield Communications 02 9558 1605

RRP $499

SO THE NEW WAVE in audio has arrived, and MP3 is its name. The term has struck fear into the hearts of music label magnates for the last several months, and the debate over copyright and lost royalties is reaching fever pitch.

The MP3 digital music format is actually the audio component of the MPEG format, itself used to encode movies for DVD. It's a highly-compressed format which allows a 40Mb CD-quality audio file to be shrunk to less than one tenth its size – small enough that downloading such files from the Net becomes viable. No wonder record companies are concerned – the software to convert tracks from CD to MP3 is freely available on the Web and pirate MP3 sites are prolific.



Diamond has taken MP3 to the next logical step: portable, skip-free, CD-quality audio from a player similar in size (and weight) to a deck of playing cards. The Rio PMP300 has no moving parts, gives around 12 hours playback from a single AA battery and resembles a very small Walkman in form and function.

Installation of the supplied software and hardware took just six minutes, including attaching the supplied printer-port pass-through adaptor.

The supplied software consists of an MP3 player, a playlist editor and a viewer to peek inside the Rio's built-in 32Mb of RAM (equivalent to just over half an hour of music, and expandable to 64Mb). There's a jukebox program for creating your own MP3s and 100 sample song files. To load the Rio with songs, order them in the playlist, then drag to the memory window and the download begins (about 30 seconds for each four-minute track; the Rio doesn't accept first-generation copyrighted MP3s). Unplug the Rio, don the ear-plug headphones, press play and you're away.

If I've made this sound easy, that's because it is. In fact, the hardest part is getting enough MP3s to keep your toes tapping. / **MATTHEW BUCHANAN**

Norton SystemWorks

Platforms Windows 95/98/NT4

Available from Tech Pacific 02 9381 6000, Express Data 02 9598 9100

RRP $229

SOME SAY GOOD THINGS come in twos. Or, in the case of this smart box of tricks, fives. SystemWorks has five Norton products in one integrated suite. This seems to be the way software is going – for a cheaper price overall, you get a whole bundle of goodies. In the case of SystemWorks, you get an integrated suite of utilities to protect your machine, solve problems (including the detection and removal of viruses) and recover from disasters. In one swoop, you can eliminate the worst Windows headaches, by detecting and eliminating problems before they occur, preventing crashes and removing unwanted files. All this in a single install and with a central interface.

Included is the famous Norton Utilities, which helps solve potentially disruptive hardware and soft-

ware problems, and optimises your computer to run at peak efficiency. Norton AntiVirus attempts to fight the never-ending battle against those rascals who spread unwanted viruses, while CrashGuard does its best to prevent those crippling system crashes and screen freezes that can ruin hours of work. Norton Uninstall frees valuable disc space by automatically uncluttering your PC of redundant files and useless data when you go to remove applications.

The product comes with the addition of a six-month subscription to Norton Web Services, which gives access to updates on viruses, hardware drivers and software. For best results, all of the products in the suite are functionally integrated – for example if Norton Utilities detects the system is low on disk space, the product recommends running Norton Uninstall.

This excellent bundle gives you complete versions of each of the products, which have all been updated to take advantage of the Windows 98 upgrade. If you already own one or more of the products in the suite, there is a special upgrade price of $190. / **NIGEL HORROCKS**

NeoPlanet 2.0

★★★★

Platform Win 95/98

Available From ftp://ftp.neoplanet.com/pub/neosetup20315.exe

RRP freeware

FORGET THE Netscape/Internet Explorer (IE) battle. Smaller, faster, and smarter programs like the Opera browser and this new entry are the popular alternative. NeoPlanet installs seamlessly, importing your favourites and email configuration as it goes. And that's essentially what NeoPlanet is – a slick overlay for IE or Netscape. It's less a browser and more a friendly front door to the Internet. Comprehensive in-browser searching is combined with a built-in email client, modem speed booster and the ability to screen out images and pop-up windows. Customisation is one of the main thrusts of NeoPlanet and the channel bars, along with almost everything else, are tweakable. The authors describe NeoPlanet as a "plug-out", and it does simplify surfing and URL management. / **BRUCE DAVIS-GOFF**

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Shareware

JLC SplitIt 95 ✪✪✪✪

Platform File Splitter for Win 95/98/NT
Price Freeware **Size** 102Kb **Site** simtel.net/pub/simtelnet/win95/fileutl/spltit31.zip

IF YOU DON'T HAVE a CD burner, it can be a chore to distribute files bigger than the 1.44 Mg that will fit on a floppy. JLC SplitIt 95 is a utility that can split files into pieces for transporting to other computers or over the Net. It has piles of options to customise and specify how to split files with preset sizes available from a list of common disk sizes. It uses disk space efficiently and automatically generates a batch file for stitching it all back together again. It's plain, simple, easy to use and it's free!

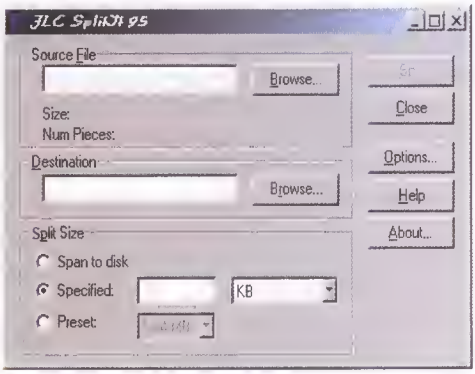
MyFiles ✪✪✪✪

Platform File Cataloguer for Win 95/98/NT
Price Freeware **Size** 2.13Mb
Site www2.famvid.com/airjrdn/MyFiles.zip

IF YOU'RE COLLECTING and backing up a large number of files, you'll eventually need a file cataloguer to keep track of which file is where. This saves the boring process of scanning disks to find where you hastily put the crucial file you now need.

MyFiles is a straightforward file cataloguer that will do just this. MyFiles creates and maintains a database of any media storage device connected to your computer and has good search capabilities. It has a back up function for the database and is an easy to use program.

/ **BRUCE DAVIS-GOFF**



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let's chat!

Louise Richardson shows how easy it is to let your fingers do the talking...

The Web can be a lonely place – electronic page after page covers all kinds of information, news, views, the ridiculous and some great time wasters. It's all there for the asking, but out on the Web you're on your own. IRC stands for Internet Relay Chat, which in simple terms, is the mechanism for having a conversation in cyberspace. A system of servers, similar to those that house Web pages, can host a "chat" between any number of people from all over the world. The difference between online "chats" and talking on the phone is that the "talking" is done using a keyboard. IRC can be used for work purposes, such as conducting conferences, but by far the best reason to jump into IRC is just the joy of communicating with people from other countries and cultures.

That thing you do

Before you begin you'll need to get your hands on some specialised IRC software. This software allows you to see what's happening inside a chat channel more clearly and has lots of great features, like menus and toolbars, to make life less confusing.

Before you download any of this software make sure you look at the instructions so you'll be clear on how to set it up and any problems you may face. If you're running a Macintosh, IRCle (**www.ircle.com**) is popular software for the job. mIRC (**www.mirc.com**) is probably the best option for Windows users, though you'll find plenty of other options on the Web. These are shareware programs, which means you can use them for free, but if you decide to keep them you are expected to pay a registration fee.

For this article we'll use mIRC (pronounced "murk") to show how to get chatting and what IRC looks when you are. Although mIRC may not be the software you opt for, it should still give you an understanding of the software you're using.

Build me up

IRC works on the client-server principle. The software you set up on your computer is the client and the server you connect to is part of a network of servers all over the world.

Run the setup/installer file and follow the instructions to install the software, then launch the program. The first thing you'll see is the "About mIRC" introduction box. Close this window and a setup window will appear (if it doesn't choose File/Setup from the menu).

This will open a box containing a list of servers to get you connected to IRC and some blank spaces for you to fill in your details. When entering details, bear in mind that no one can make you give correct information, and it pays to maintain some anonymity. Any information you enter here will be available to the other people on the IRC channel if they wish to look it up.

Where the software prompts you to enter your real name, you may choose to enter only a given name or nickname. The next step is to choose a nickname for your visit to IRC. The nickname you enter will be what everyone sees in the conversation. In case someone else is using your nickname at that time, you should provide an alternative also. If you don't and your nickname is being used you'll be asked for another when you connect to the server.

Server side

Before you can connect you need to select a server. At any one time you will find between 5,000 and 30,000 people from all over the world connected to these IRC networks, which makes for some pretty interesting chatter.

Don't get confused here. When you connect to the Internet through your ISP, you connect to your ISP's server. You use the mIRC software to connect to another server that is part of the IRC network. A drop-down menu in the setup box will contain a list of servers around the world. You can connect to any of these, though it is probably best to choose one that is geographically close to you.

wot's a bot?

"BOT" IS SHORT for robot, and in this sense refers to a computer program that is designed especially to patrol IRC channels. In the same way that it can be hard to tell if the person you are talking to when chatting is being sincere or sarcastic, it can be hard to tell the difference between a genuinely spontaneous response and a pre-programmed one.

Some bots are programmed with specific responses to questions or keywords; others control things for the real user when they are absent from the channel, so while the operator of a channel may go away, the bot steps in to keep it open, make the owner's friends operators and ban others from the channel. In most cases the bots are just fun or a prank; in others they can be a research experiment.

There are many different networks that you can choose for IRC. Generally speaking, the Efnet (**www.efnet.org**) is the mother of them all, but just as a very busy bridge has many traffic jams and piles of drivers, Efnet can be just as busy and it can become frustrating for beginners. There are some networks that are devoted to certain kinds of users. Undernet (**www.undernet.org**) is generally considered to be the friendly, popular alternative to Efnet. Dalnet (**www.dalnet.org**), is another network that is becoming quite popular.

You will need to enter the address of the server you want to connect to when you are setting up your IRC client. mIRC comes with a long list of servers around the world. If, when filling in the server details, you have to supply a port address, use 6667 which is the most common.

Making whoopee

After selecting the server and filling in your details it's time to connect. If you find you can't connect to the server, check the address you supplied in the set-up box or try using another server. When you have connected you'll see a screen full of info from the server, usually with the rules and regulations and welcoming you to the network (this is called the MOTD – message of the day). It might also tell you to supply another nickname if the one you have chosen is already in use.

Although you are connected at this point you are still not able to chat to anyone. This is a "status" screen and is just like being in the hallway and having to work out what room you want to go into. The rooms in this case are channels, and you'll need to know a few commands before you can see them, let alone move between them. Just a few simple commands will allow you to locate→

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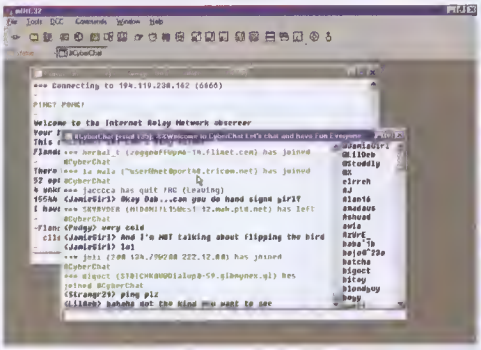

Chat channels can move fairly quickly. A list of users is presented down the right hand of the window, with their comments scrolling in the left side. Simply type your comments and responses in the lower panel and hit Enter. The Status window (in background) displays server messages and remains active while you are online.

a channel you want, enter and leave the channel, send private messages, change your nickname.

To get talking you need to choose a channel. When you've connected to a server, mIRC will present a list of channels you can join. Some good places for new chatters to start are #chat (the # denotes a channel name) and #newbies.

As you visit more and more channels you'll find most are named quite aptly, so if you are a feminist, for example, don't go to a channel with its topic advertised as "sexy women wanted" unless you feel like being offended. Likewise, if you hate science fiction avoid the *Star Trek* channels – after all, free speech on the Internet covers a multitude of topics.

Most users eventually find a happy home on IRC where they can meet and become friends with people with similar interests from all over the world.

Proficiency takes practice

The only way to learn about chatting is to get in there and have a chat. You'll pick up a lot as you go along and others are generally pretty helpful when you get stuck. If you do get stuck or don't understand and don't want to seem stupid take yourself to **#help** and ask away. This room is usually well patrolled by very helpful IRC experts and they're always happy and willing to help you out should you need them.

A few last words of caution for those venturing into chat for the first time: children should be supervised in online chat rooms, for obvious reasons; be very careful before giving out your real name and/or address; IRC is generally uncensored and chat room topics can at times be lewd and offensive – but that's what makes it fun. ➜

at my command

TO PARTICIPATE IN IRC you'll need to master a few simple commands so you can locate a channel you want, enter and leave the channel, send private messages, change your nickname and quit the whole scene.

To issue a command you must use a "/" and then type the command. As you type what you're saying and your commands in the same space, remember anything you type without a slash will be read by everyone.

/list This will give you a list of all the channels currently operating on the server. Channels are constantly being created and deserted. There's little concept of permanency unless a channel is created regularly or there are people in there all the time, so the best way to see what's on offer is to list them. Beware, some

people like giving shocking names to their channels and graphic descriptions of the topic of discussion. It's a case of anything goes.

/join #channel Use this to join a particular channel by using the channel name, eg. /join #newbies

/part #channel or **/leave** Use these commands to leave a channel. Alternatively you can simply close the chat window.

/me This is the command that gives you an action in the chat. For example "/me waves hello to everyone" will come up in a different colour in the chat window and read "<your nickname> waves hello to everyone".

/msg <nickname> message This is how you give a fellow IRC participant a private message, eg. /msg <nickname> please email me that info

/query <nickname> message This gives someone a private message by opening a query window. A better choice for sending longer messages to the user in question, eg. /query <nickname> please email me that info

/whois <nickname> This command gives you information about another user.

/nick <nickname> This allows you to change your nickname. You can change your nickname at any time through a chat and everyone will see a notification that you are now called something else, eg. "/nick Jane" changes whatever you were known as previously to "Jane". People tend to become very attached to their nicknames, so if you are a newcomer and someone else has your favourite name you are better off thinking of a new one than trying to convince them to give theirs up.

/quit <reason> This command will disconnect you from IRC and give you the option of telling everyone why you are leaving, eg. /quit time for bed

/away <reason> This lets everyone know that you're not there at the moment or not paying attention, eg. /away phone call

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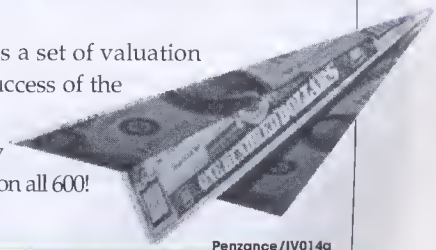

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saying what youmean...

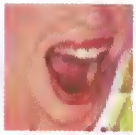
THE PROBLEM WITH THE written word is that it tends to be taken quite literally. Sarcasm and humour can be easily misinterpreted on IRC and to overcome this problem many abbreviations and symbols have been adopted to keep the messages clear. Using the /me command can also be useful.

Some common abbreviations are:

lol	laughing out loud
rotfl	roll on the floor laughing
btw	by the way
f2f	face to face
fwiw	for what it's worth
ihni	I have no idea
imho	in my humble/honest opinion
irl	in real life
rtfm	read the manual
fyi	for your information
ttfn	ta-ta for now

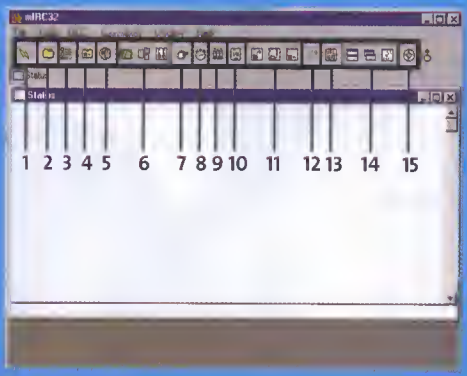
Some common symbols are:

smiling	:-)
simple smile	:)
laughing	:-D
winking	;-)
frowning	:-(
undecided	:-\
tongue-tied	:-&
poking your tongue out	:-P
long-stemmed rose	@——
stick man	o-|-<
you've been mooned	(_;_)



demystifying mIRC

1 Click this to connect to a server
2 Opens the setup box, for changing servers and entering personal information
3 General options, specify how mIRC will look and operate
4 List your favourite channels
5 List all channels on IRC (same as /list)
6 mIRC editor options
7 Allows you to "finger" a person in order to obtain more information about them
8 Online timer
9 Colour preferences
10 Address book
11 DCC controls, allow you to connect directly to another user's IRC client, bypassing the IRC server. Options include Send, enabling you to send files to someone while you chat to them
12 Notify list, lets you know when your friends are also using IRC
13 URL list, captures URLs from chat sessions for later viewing
14 Layout options, for tiling and cascading windows, etc.
15 Help



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alien at my table

Daniel Fallon investigates reports that science-fiction sites are taking over the world

The search for proof of the paranormal goes on. With hundreds of sightings following every episode of X-files, the truth is undoubtably out there...in cyberspace. Our fascination with

the future is spurred on by daily advances in technology, our search for extra-terrestrials and a burgeoning genre featuring mega-budget Hollywood movies and best-selling science-fiction novels. If we can trust the wall of information being pitched at us on such topics as space flight, aliens and communication, our children's children are going to lead very interesting lives on Venus. That's if we put aside all thoughts of general Armageddon, which seem to be intertwined around bleak predictions about the end-of-the-millennium.

Popcorn and robots

At the movies, the growth of tech-noir films has led to box-office smashes such as *Terminator 1* and *2*, *Blade Runner*, *Aliens* and more recently, *Armageddon*. You'll find plenty of background information about the films online. To read about the history of the popular genre, head for Science Fiction Films (**www.filmsite.org/sci-fifilms.html**). Sci-fi movies, such as Warner's *Matrix* (**www.whatisthematrix.com**) starring Keanu Reeves, are in a constant stream of production. You can check out the trailer to this thriller, which was filmed in Sydney, at the site. You'll need the Quicktime 3.0 (**www.apple.com/quicktime/**) plug-in first. Fox (**www.fox.com**) features e-zine Sci-Fox Online for fans of its movies. Visitors can drill down on information on last year's *X-Files Movie* and *Alien Resurrection*, while its archive is also useful. You might notice an increase in the availability of sci-fi movies on the digital video standard DVD online. Miramax, for instance is offering a catalogue at **www.miramax.com:8888/ows-doc/dvd/dvd_02.html**.This is an indicator we soon could be downloading our films rather than renting out videos. The future is near.

When George Lucas started production on a sci-fi trilogy called *Star Wars* in the early seventies, it would have been hard to imagine the effect this legendary story was to have. It's been some time since the last film, *Return Of the Jedi* thrilled audiences the world over and now a new generation of *Star Wars* movies is about to be released from Fox Studios and Lucasfilms. Catch up with the wave of hype building up around the upcoming *Star Wars* movie at **www.starwars.com**. It appears as though there are another two movies planned, set before Luke Skywalker enrolled as a hero Jedi in the first movie. Everyone is a lot younger, including OBI and Darth Vader himself. There's some pretty interesting behind-the-scenes facts and an online diary about the production of the picture, which avid fans should enjoy. You can also download the Quicktime trailer from here or from Apple (**www.apple.com**).

Another creative genius, Steven Spielberg is always busy producing science-fiction offerings. Ever since *ET* blazed across the cinema screens worldwide, Spielberg has always had something extraordinary in production. With everything from *Close Encounters* to *Jurassic Park* in his portfolio, one can be assured they'll be plenty more sci-fi goodies from the master. You can make a movie with the great man himself at Director's Chair (**directors chair.com/crew/steven_spielberg**).

Star Trekkin'

Fans seem to die-hard when it comes to popular television shows, especially the ones that make it to the big screen. Despite efforts to squash Star-Trek sites by copyright owner Paramount, which runs the official 'Continuum' site at **www.startrek.com**, fans are still publishing their pages furiously on the Web. For instance, you'll find a whole array of audio clips, screensavers, icons and fonts from *Star Trek* Sound and Vision (**www.stinsv.com**). A new generation of Trekkers are getting their kicks at Space Battles (**www.spacebattles.com**), which let's you download videos of *Babylon 5* and *Star Trek* ships in battle. Those who really want to get into the nitty-grity can head for the The Ferengi Commerce Commission (**belegost.mit.edu/steve/trek.html**). On entering you are warned, 'Your Latinum donation has been recorded'. This is a Trekker's heaven right from the word go, with midi-files aplenty. Let's not forget William Shatner as Captain Kirk, the original officer in charge of The Enterprise. Check out Melissa's Shatner Page (**www.webconn.net/~kac/bill.html**) and reminisce a while. Or take a peek at our own Austrek (**home.vicnet.net.au/~austrek**) Trekker's fan club, which has a short stories section and a gallery of artists' sci-fi impressions. The Bajoran Resource Centre (**www.webcon.net.au/bajor/**) shows that there's a lot more to the series than meets the eye, with this *Star Trek* race getting a whole site dedicated to it.

Fans' zone

Trekkies aren't the only fans promoting their favourite shows and movies on the Web. You'll find an assortment of *Star Wars* sites using the force to bring goodwill to surfers across the globe. Star Walking – The *Star Wars* Appreciation Society of Australia (**home.mira.net/~kryten/starwalking/default.htm**), for instance, is a good example. Here you'll find information on the Force Three *Star Wars* Saga Convention, which is in June this year. Echo Station (**www.echostation.com**) is another great hub for fans of the trilogy, offering interviews, news, reviews and a *Star Wars* timeline. There's a stack of gaming sites using the *Star Wars* story too, such as *Rebel Assault II* (**www.lucasarts.com/static/reb2/reb2.htm**) and Rogue Squadron (**www.lucasarts.com/products/rogue/rogue_intro.htm**).

The X-Files (**www.thex-files.com**) is one of the most popular series on television and fans can keep track of the latest news at this site. The X-Files magazine and game are also available here. Keen punters can join the Official X-Files Fan Club at **192.41.27.106/xfilesfanclub**. The recent X-Files Movie site (**www.fightthefuture.com**) has clips of the movie for download. You can order all sort of sci-fi movie and TV memorabilia, including

X-files bookmarks and phone cards, from Starland (**www.powerup.com.au/~starland/**). Fans can also join the **aus.tv.x-files newsgroup** to discuss whether you think the tension built between Moulder and Scully will end in romance.

Dr Who, a classic ongoing adventure through time and space, has fans world wide. If you're one of them, head for the Doctor Who site (**www.drwho.org.uk**) for a fix of audio and video clips of the popular show.

For links to other science fiction fan sites, head for **ocw.north.net.au/trek.htm**. There are plenty from *Battlestar Gallactica to Blade Runner* covered here.

For your regular injection of sci-fi, stop of at e-zine Science Fiction Weekly (**www.scifi.com/sfw/**). You'll find news, book and film reviews, audio interview of the stars and a featured sci-fi image. This site is well worth a visit for those who want to plug into the latest gossip on the scene. For instance when I visited, I learnt Rowan Atkinson is going to star in a parody on *Doctor Who*. Now that I've got to see. Another good resource is The Ultimate Science Fiction Web Guide (**www.magicdragon.com/UltimateSF/SF-Index.htm**) which has information on 8,900 authors and pseudonyms (3,200 of these with hotlinks).

Closer to home, there's plenty of sci-fi heads letting their imagination's go wild. There are even awards for individuals writing in the genre. You can find out about the various awards at Vicnet (**home.vicnet.net.au/~sfoz/awards.htm**). The Australian Science Fiction Awards are called Ditmars, named after Martin James (Ditmar) Jenssen, a founding member of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club (**home.vicnet.net.au/~msfc/welcome.htm**). There are awards for both professional authors and fans alike, including a prize for the best non-professional work in any non-printed medium, which could mean the Web. You can send in a nomination form for your favourite pieces at the site too. To find out more about science fiction writers, publishers and bookshops go to Australian Science Fiction (**www.maths.uts.edu.au/staff/eric/ozwriter/index.htm**).

Addicted bookworms can always head for the sci-fi section of bookshops such as Australian Online Bookshop (**www.bookworm.com.au/toptensf.htm**), Dymocks (**www.dymocks.com.au**) or Angus and Robertson (**www.angusrobertson.com.au**).

UFO conspiracy

One of most popular theories of conspiracy – of the X-Files variety – is the US government's secret base, Area 51. You'll deem lots of interesting theories from sites on the subject. Apparently they've got a bunch of aliens on ice and are harnessing their advanced technology for military purposes. Find out more from the S4 Database (**area51.icom.net/s4/**). It

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even has an anonymous FTP area for people in the know to upload their sightings, experiences and abduction data. Controversy over another US base, Roswell, also abounds at sites such as Rosewell Glyphics Deciphered (**members.aol. com/nsp97/roswell.htm**) and The Rosewell Incident (**webclub.solutions.fi/~harriv/roswell.html**).

Another great stop for the paranoid is Conspire.com (**www.conspire.com**), where you'll find interviews with UFO sleuths and an archive of UFO stuff. A good place to start looking for the unexplained is at Conspiracies and Extremism (**conspiracies.miningco.com**), where you can access a directory of extraordinary links, including UFO and unexplained conspiracies.

Finally someone has gotten serious about all the socks going missing from the laundry. The Bureau of Missing Socks (**www.jagat.com/joil/socks.html**) is investigating claims that socks are stolen from washing lines by aliens.

Art Bell (**www.artbell.com**) has one of America's top night radio talk shows about extraordinary happenings. You can listen live or there are plenty of archived audio files of callers who claim to have met aliens via Broadcast.com. You'll probably meet some interesting types in the chat room as well.

If you're feeling rather sceptical about the presence of aliens in our midst, you should find one for yourself. Just pick up a UFO Detector (**www.ufodetector.com/products.htm**) – this site accepts all common credit cards.

A good place to purchase books on paranormal content is at Ufomind (**www.ufomind.com**), which has a friendly paranormal search index. Or you may wish to tune into Parnet's (**www.parnet.org/paranet/**) radio program, hosted by Michael Corbin, who believes science can't explain everything. It's possible to create an alien too – find out at Alien Autopsy (**www.trudang.com/autopsy.html**).There's also plenty of chat rooms to talk about your own paranormal experiences. Try Area 51 chat (**www.fourmilab.ch/earthview/vplanet.html**). But to get your general round-up on the latest UFO sightings, landings and alien interaction head for UFOSeek (**members.aol.com/ufoseek/bridge.htm**) and CNI news (**www.cninews.com**).

Real sci-fi

Even for the more sceptical public, the division between reality and make-believe is becoming increasingly blurred as yesterday's pipe dreams become today's plans. Although we haven't got a human colony on the moon, like in *Space 1999*, the world's two leading space agencies, NASA

(**www. nasa.gov**) and The Russian Space Agency (**www. rka.ru**), have been working hard at realising the dream of sustaining humans in space. Russia's Mir project, a space station that has been in orbit for some ten years, is an important step in the campaign to colonise space. Earth Bud (**mir.irisz.hu**) provides a live audio feed from the station when it is in satellite range, and you can also track the Mir's exact position as it passes over the world. You can find out more about the Russian space program at the Russian Space Science Internet Server (**www.rssi.ru**) and the Yuri Gargarin Cosmonauts Training Center (**howe.iki.rssi.ru/GCTC/gctc_e. htm**), which trains Russian cosmonauts. For other tracking links and NASA space operations information go to Liftoff (**liftoff.msfc. nasa.gov**). Or check out the flight schedule for the next blast off from Kennedy Space Center (**www.ksc. nasa.gov**) and view it via its site.

During NASA's Mars Pathfinder project (**path finder.com**) last year, data was streamed from its servers to Web sites around the world. There's plenty of images of the red planet at Mars Surveyor 98 (**mars.jpl.nasa.gov/msp98/images. html**).

The Web can provide an alternative view of the world too. Investigate the Earth and Moon Viewer (**www. fourmilab.ch/earthview/vplanet.html**) for example.

With the end of the millennium upon us, there has been a lot of whoohar about the end of the world. If you fear the world may be brought to Armageddon by an asteroid or comet, rest easy. NASA is keeping track of any possible problems at Asteroid and Comet Impact Hazards (**impact. arc.nasa.gov**).

After visiting some of these sites you begin to wonder when we'll be able to beam ourselves down to the beach or into work or to school on a Monday morning, aka *Star Trek* style. Whether or not you believe in the existence of other intelligent life-forms in the universe, one thing is for sure — the truth is out there...

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keeping kids safe

There are plenty of reasons for assisting your child to get the best online experience. Angela Booth examines the options

If you read the headline news, you'll believe that the Internet is a dangerous place. In a sense, that's true. The Internet has its rip-off merchants, thugs and red-light districts just as in the real world. Some areas are no-goes for kids. Just as you wouldn't let your kids explore the backstreets of Sydney or Melbourne alone, they need guidance and protection on the Internet.

Nevertheless, the risks should be kept in perspective. The chances that your child will be physically or mentally harmed because of an online experience are slim. It's much more likely that they'll come across rudeness, or bad language, or will waste time that could be spent more productively. The common solution for parents is to explain the dangers and make rules. First however, you need to be aware of what the risks for children are.

The risks we take

One of the biggest risks for kids is exposure to pornography and violent imagery. Avoiding pornography on the Net is perhaps one of the key problems children need to be protected from. Using search engines to find even a harmless search topic can still be dangerous. Shortly after the death of Princess Diana, if you typed "Princess Diana" into search engines, you'd be greeted with a mile of porno sites.

Chat rooms, bulletin boards and email can also pose a threat for children if they go unmonitored. Your child may receive email, chat or bulletin board messages that are harassing, rude or even threatening. And of course, just as there are con-artists in the real world, so there are con-artists online. Bargains that would look suspicious to an adult (say a half price Furby) can look tempting to a child with a credit card. Your child may make online purchases without your approval, or may be tricked into giving out your credit card numbers and other financial details. Gambling sites might also be a danger to kids who see them simply as online computer games sites. Keep that credit card safe.

Children are attracted to chat services and online games sites. These sites can be huge time wasters. If your child becomes interested in playing an online game, they can spend hours gaming. Develop rules about how much time your child can spend online. You might limit the time to half an hour on school days, and an hour on weekends. Limiting your child's access time is also an issue. The risk with allowing your child to know your password is that they may either use the Net by themselves, unmonitored, or give away your private access details to strangers.

A parent's role

Usually, if your child's school provides Internet access, you will have been notified. Perhaps you've even been asked to sign a form, giving your permission for your child to use the school's PCs to go online. It's worth checking out how they use the Net and how they monitor it. "Create rules and stick by the rules" is the consensus among parents whose children use the Internet. David Fielder has a 9-year-old son, and has always supervised his son's online time. "We have strict rules, including that he can't ever go into chat rooms or email anyone he doesn't know, or put any personal info, such as an email address, anywhere unless I know about it. And he's good about it, so I don't worry."

CHILD PROTECTION

Vyvyan Lynn is another parent with a 9-year-old who has strict rules about what she allows him to do online. "He's allowed to use the computer only with my guidance. I find his site, or if he goes to a search engine to look up Godzilla and finds sites he'd like to check out, he calls me and I check them out first."

If you have a six to twelve year-old, make it a rule that your child can't use the PC when you aren't home. Also consider keeping the computer in the family room, rather than in your child's bedroom. Your child should also understand that they are not to give out information like your home address, their school's name, or your telephone number, in any public area online, such as in chat rooms or on bulletin boards. You should also know who your child is emailing. Tell your child that she must not respond to messages or bulletin board items that are suggestive, obscene, or threatening, or which make them feel uncomfortable. Ask your child to tell you if they see such a message.

Safe access

If you can't always be there when your child uses the PC, you can use the computer itself to keep your child safe. Many Internet Service Providers (ISPs) provide access solutions. AOL (**www.aol.com**), for instance, provides access control, and you can vary the amount of restriction depending on the age of the child. If your child is under 12, you can assign a "kids only" category to their account. Young teenagers and older teenagers have a little more freedom, but are still restricted. Chat rooms are also monitored to keep the AOL environment safe.

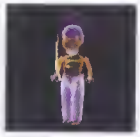
CompuServe (**www.compuserve.com.au**) offers members a software program called Cyber Patrol. This program is free, and can be downloaded from the CompuServe Web site. Cyber Patrol is also available on the CD-ROM which CompuServe sends to new subscribers. The software provides parental control at a level selected by the parent, according to Compuserve marketing manager John Tunkunas. "Cyber Patrol gives full control to parents. It lets them decide which parts of CompuServe, and also which areas of the Internet, are available to their children. It's completely up to the parents to decide what they want to restrict." If you're not a CompuServe member, you can still use Cyber Patrol, by downloading a free trial version from **www.cyberpatrol.com**. Check with your own ISP to discover whether they provide access monitoring or filtering for children.

Software solutions

If your ISP doesn't offer filtering or blocking, there's a number of software programs that will do it for you, and they're reasonably priced, usually under $100.

The popular Net Nanny program (**www.netnanny.com**) can be downloaded and trialed for free. It allows you to monitor, screen and block ac-

Cyber Patrol helps filter out unsuitable sites for kids.



Disney (disney.go.com/dig/today/) has games and activities for children.

cess to material you select, no matter whether it's on your own PC, or on the Internet. The program works whether you're connected to the Internet or not. On the Internet, you can block Web sites, newsgroups, chat channels, personal information (cookies), and words and phrases. On your PC, Net Nanny can block or monitor: email programs like Outlook, Pegasus, and Eudora, chat programs such as MIRC, ICQ, as well as Quicken, MS Word and Internet browsers including Internet Explorer and Netscape.

The Surf Monkey site (**www.surfmonkey.com**) offers a downloadable rocket-ship browser. The browser is fun for kids, but it also blocks access to unsuitable online content. Surf Monkey also offers safe chat areas for kids. Another option is Cyber Sentinel (**www.securitysoft.com**), which is software that uses built-in and user-defined libraries to monitor words and phrases, and to block inappropriate sites.

Surfwatch (**www1.surfwatch.com**) also gives you a lot of control. It optionally blocks access to five categories of information: drugs/alcohol/tobacco, gambling, hate speech, sexually explicit material, and violent material, and can block chat sites as well. If you're concerned about a particular site, and it's not blocked by Surfwatch, you can submit the site for blocking review.

CYBERsitter's blocking software (**www.cybersitter.com**) is one of the most customisable offerings. Most children won't even know that it's installed, because it works in the background and analyses all Internet activities. If it detects activity you've chosen to block, it stops that activity. CYBERsitter can even keep a history of all Internet activity, including attempts to access blocked material.

Kids' stops

Although you may opt to install filtering software, you should also point kids in the direction of enjoyable kids-safe sites. Fortunately, there's a mile of excellent sites online for kids, both educational and simply fun.

On the educational side, the Australian K12 Education Service for Schools and Homes (**www.studentnet.edu.au**) provides free student membership to reviewed resources to make homework a breeze. Combining education and fun, the GO Network (**www.go.com**) is a Disney portal site that has everything you'd expect from the Disney name: child-safe information (general information and homework help), games, and lots of activities.

Another useful service for kids is Galaxy Kids (**www.galaxykids.com.au**), which aims to teach children aged three to seven to read and introduces them to basic maths. Users must first subscribe online, by filling out the application form at the site. Once subscribed, customers use a username and password to download weekly online 'magazines'. Parents are encouraged to participate in the learning process through Galaxy over the 52 week program, which features alien characters that help make learning fun. The Galaxy Kids platform and content was developed by New

Zealand-based Sunshine (**www.sunshine.aust.com**), which has produced around 1,500 learn-to-read book titles for children.

Also, if your child needs project information, Yahooligans (**www.yahooligans.com**) is Yahoo in miniature, designed for kids from six to twelve. It's a subject guide, which means that it has humans sorting out Web sites, choosing sites to include, and categorising them.

The Lycos site also has kids-safe features. If you want your kids to be able to use a comprehensive search engine, but don't want to be worried about what they might find, you should register for Lycos' Search Guard (**personal.lycos.com/safetynet/safetynet.asp**). It's a free service that screens out adult content from Lycos searches. Disney's Internet Guide (**disney.go.com/dig/today/**) has a great interface, and is also fun for kids. There's always something to do. For example, when I visited, the site was exploring online magic sites.

Use Ask Jeeves for Kids (www.ajkids.com) for searches.

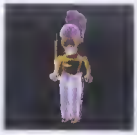
Ask Jeeves for Kids (**www.ajkids.com**) is another excellent search site. It lets visitors enter search requests in plain English. Just tell the searcher what you want, like: "I need a recipe for mud cake". The searcher tries to find a single most relevant site. It will also offer other questions that are relevant. If you have a child of primary school age, you'll probably find that Ask Jeeves for Kids is the best place to start for most searches.

CyberSmart (**www.cybersmart.org**) is a US portal for kids and schools, which is also worth checking out. It aims to teach children how to use the Internet safely, and provides teachers with material they can use when creating lessons. All the material is free.

Other fun stops for kids include the ABC's PlayGround (**www.abc.net.au/children/**), which has online games, as well as downloadable games for kids in all age groups, and Nickelodeons' online treehouse at **www.nickelodeon.com.au**, which featues games such as Cybernauts and Paintballs — the elephant that speaks as well as a *Rug Rats* movie section.

Safety zones

If you wish to limit a child's Internet access further, there are a number of services that offer



closed environments especially for children. Kahootz (**www.kahootz.com**), for instance, is an exclusive "kids club", which offers lots of fun activities. To join Kahootz you'll need to apply on the site for the free CD-ROM. Once you've paid the subscription, children can create their own online identities and use their creativity to build personal sites with sound, images and animation. Chatting is also a feature of the service.

Another alternative service is Kidz.net (**www.kidz.net.au**), which basically aims to offer the best material on the Internet, offline. The managing director of Kidz.net, Brad Duffy, says the service was developed as a more effective alternative to filtering software. Kidznet aims not only to keep kids safe, but also to save kids and teachers computer time, Duffy says. It contains material for every school syllabus in Australia, and the Kidz.net database is offered free to schools and ISPs. Therefore, your first step should be to ring your ISP, to discover whether they offer Kidz.net. Currently, 18 ISPs are hooked up to the service, and another 36 are about to offer the service.

kids-safe rules

Here are some basic rules:

1. Block pornographic, violent or gambling [illegible] ng software, safety zones and ISP-access opt[illegible]

2. Know [illegible] threatening me[illegible]

3. Limit [illegible] rooms [illegible] games

Although there are pitfalls for children online, it's possible to make the Internet child-safe with a little care. Whether you choose ISP-level filtering, blocking software, or decide to use an alternative like Kidz.net, you have a choice of many tools to make your children's online experiences both fun and educational. 'Now you can switch the computer on Johnny...

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Cocktails & Dreams

To celebrate our Birthday Issue, Jenny Brice taste tests a variety of potent sites for your drinking pleasure.

If you envy people who mix and serve unusual cocktails with the confidence and panache of a professional, or those who discuss wines with knowledgeable familiarity, don't get jealous, get even. With the help of the Internet, you can clue up on all types of helpful beverage sites. Whether it be in a can of beer, a cask of wine, a bottle of Grange Hermitage or a magnum of imported Champagne, your drink is covered online. There are sites about making and selling it, mixing it and drinking it. You can also explore health aspects, brewing at home or collecting miniatures online.

To your door

The Net makes it easy to order drinks, pay by credit card and take advantage of home delivery. Bear in mind that the law applies to the Net as well as the local pub, and you must be over 18 years of age.

The Grape (**www.thegrape.com.au**) offers an enormous range of beers, bottled red, white and sparkling wines, ports, sherries, spirits and liqueurs. They also sell cask wines and gifts. You can order quickly via their search facility or, if you specify a food and price range, The Grape's Wine Finder will suggest suitable drinks.

Cellar Masters (**www.cellarmasters.com.au**) offers a range of wines from their clearly presented, user friendly site. Features include a search facility, a wine and food matching chart and an impressive list of gift items and accessories. A gift reminder service will email to remind you of (for example) Uncle Bill's birthday and suggest a present. If you accept the suggestion or choose another item, the gift will be delivered by courier, but you are under no obligation.

Virtual Vineyards (**www.virtualvin.com**) supplies wines, specialty foods and gifts, while old and rare wines are available from Vintage Direct (**www. sofcom.com.au/Nicks/**). For something different visit Virtual Wine (**www.virtualwine.com.au**) and order Australian wines with your own personal label or send free "virtual wine" to a friend or colleague.

Beer Lovers Australia (**www.beerlovers.com.au**) home delivers boutique and imported beers and links with Australian and overseas breweries. It also carries a timely reminder about the folly of driving and drinking. Online whisky is available from the Tasmanian Distillery (**www.tasdistillery.com.au**), your cider needs will be met at **www.strongbow.com.au/**, and **www.dna.net.au** will supply you with alcoholic spring water.

Many overseas sites also sell alcohol, but before ordering you will need to be aware of customs and import regulations. Non-commercial items need an Informal Clearance, and duties and taxes are not usually charged on postal items valued at less than $50. The Australian Customs Service (**www.customs.gov.au**) can give you more information.

From the makers...

With all this choice available you may need to know more about the products. Once again the Net will come to your rescue with a multitude of interesting, informative sites, most of which have links to other similar pages.

The Australian Beer/Brewing Database (**www.cse.unsw.au/%/~jas/beer/**) is a good starting point for beer lovers, providing information on Aussie beers, breweries and hotels and links to

other pages. For links to world breweries click on **www.wolfcat.com.au/drinkinglinks/makers/beer.html**.

Lion Nathan (**www.lion-nathan.com/companies_brands.cfm**) controls 10 Australian breweries and 50 beer brands. Each neatly presented brewery site offers details of brands, history, tours, awards won, sponsorships, etc. Some of the well known breweries include Castlemaine Perkins (XXXX, Castlemaine) and Tooheys (Tooheys, Steinlager). Coopers has a classy page at **www.coopers.com.au** and Carlton United (Carlton, Victoria Bitter, Fosters) has a bold, bright, unofficial site at **www.yoyo.cc.monash. edu.au/~theazz/**.

Wine buffs are well catered for with a wealth of attractive sites. The official Net venue of the Australian Wine Industry (**www.wineaustralia.com.au**) has links to over 900 wineries, grouped into states and regions. Another very comprehensive site including a discussion forum, information on research and links to publications is Wine Titles (**www.winetitles.com.au**).

Southcorp (**www.southcorp.com.au**) owns numerous Australian wineries including Penfolds

(**www.penfolds.com.au**), Lindemans (**www.lindeman.com.au**), Killawarra (**www.killawarra.com.au**) and Seppelt (**www.seppelt.com.au**), all with informative, tastefully presented sites. You can access these from its newly updated hub at Australian Wines (**www.australianwines.com. au**). Many other winery sites deserve a visit, including Yalumba (**www.yalumba.com.au**) and McWilliams (**mcwilliams.com.au**).

If your interest is in spirits and liqueurs visit **www.wolfcat.com.au/drinkinglinks/makers/spirits.html** for links to world sites. One of these, Bundaberg Rum (**www.bundabergrum.aust.com**) is a must visit site with it's Shockwave features.

Whisky drinkers should check The Malt Whisky Centre (**maltwhisky.com.au**) with informative pages and links to relevant publications, societies, distilleries and enthusiasts' home pages. And at **www.w2.sbbs.se/hp/buxrud/whisky.htm** you are advised, "This site is best viewed through the bottom of a glass of amber liquid." Vodka fans have many sites to choose from, including **www.absolutvodka. com**, an intriguing site with special effects.

Cocktails and dreams

There are millions of possible cocktail variations and cocktail drinkers will find thousands of recipes on the Net. The Bartender's Handbook (**www.webtender.com/handbook)** is a good place to start learning. Here you can find out how to set up a bar, get the conversion between the traditional bar measurements (imperial) and the metric system and find some good tips and recipes for drinks. Hmmm, the fruit daiquiri sounds good. At the Stoli (**www.stoli.com)** site visitors can actually take video tutorials to learn how to make common cocktails using that drink.

The Drink Mixing Web Site, iDrink (**www.idrink.com**) alone has over 5000 and if you enter

ingredients at hand, it will select a recipe for you. The Bar (**www.bardrinks.com**) offers drink recipes, games and jokes, while Martinis – The Online Adventure (**martinis.altabase.com**) has a bright site with martini recipes from around the world. Two other great sites amongst many are The Cocktail Magazine (**www. cocktail.com**) and The Virtual Bar (**www.thevirtualbar.com**).

A good laugh goes well with a drink and the Net has a plentiful supply of humorous, alcohol-related stories and jokes. These include Bar Jokes (**www. well.com/user/zoodc/bar/**), Caroline's Bar Jokes (**www.cyberhighway.net/~transnet/humour/jbar.htm**), and Blackie's Comedy Shop (**www.flash. net/~blackie2/beer.htm**).

Help at finger's end

Whilst it is relatively easy to find sites supplying alcohol, it is more difficult discovering on line help for alcohol problems. The Bartender's Handbook (**www.webtender.com/handbook**) also offers tips for avoiding and coping with hangovers and an intoximeter to calculate your approximate blood alcohol level.

For more serious problems, Alcoholics Anonymous has an unofficial Australian site (**forsaken.warehouse.net/james/aa**) with connections to state offices and AA World Service Centre as well as twelve questions to help you decide if Alcoholics Anonymous is for you. Other help can be sought from Crisis Line (**www.vicnet.net.au/vicnet/community/crisis.htm**) and the Salvation Army (**www. salvos.org.au**).

The Australian Drug Foundation, **www.adf.org.au/drughit/hday/hdayal.html**, presents a helpful and informative page on alcohol under the general heading, "How Drugs Affect You". Written in a clear, easy to read manner, it includes detailed information on many aspects of alcohol and helpful hints for controlled enjoyment. Families and friends of alcoholics will find help at **www.al-anon-alteen.org**, which is an attractive, easily navigated site with contact details for offices worldwide, including 13 in Australia.

From ordering, to researching, to learning how to mix cocktails, there's plenty to do to increase your knowledge and enjoy some drinks through the Net. And at your next party, impress your friends with your knowledge, confidence and a fruit daiquiri. The bar is now open...

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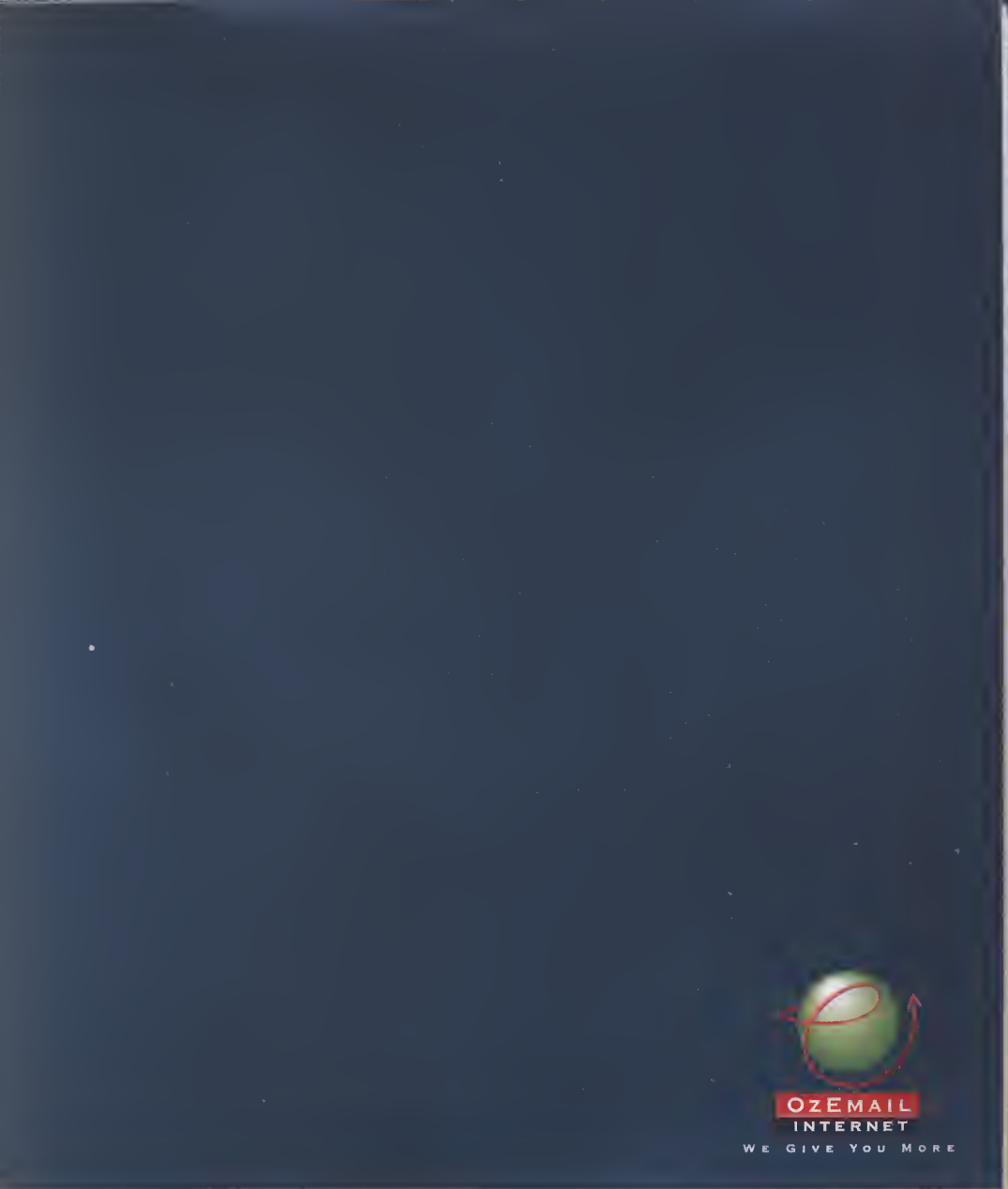


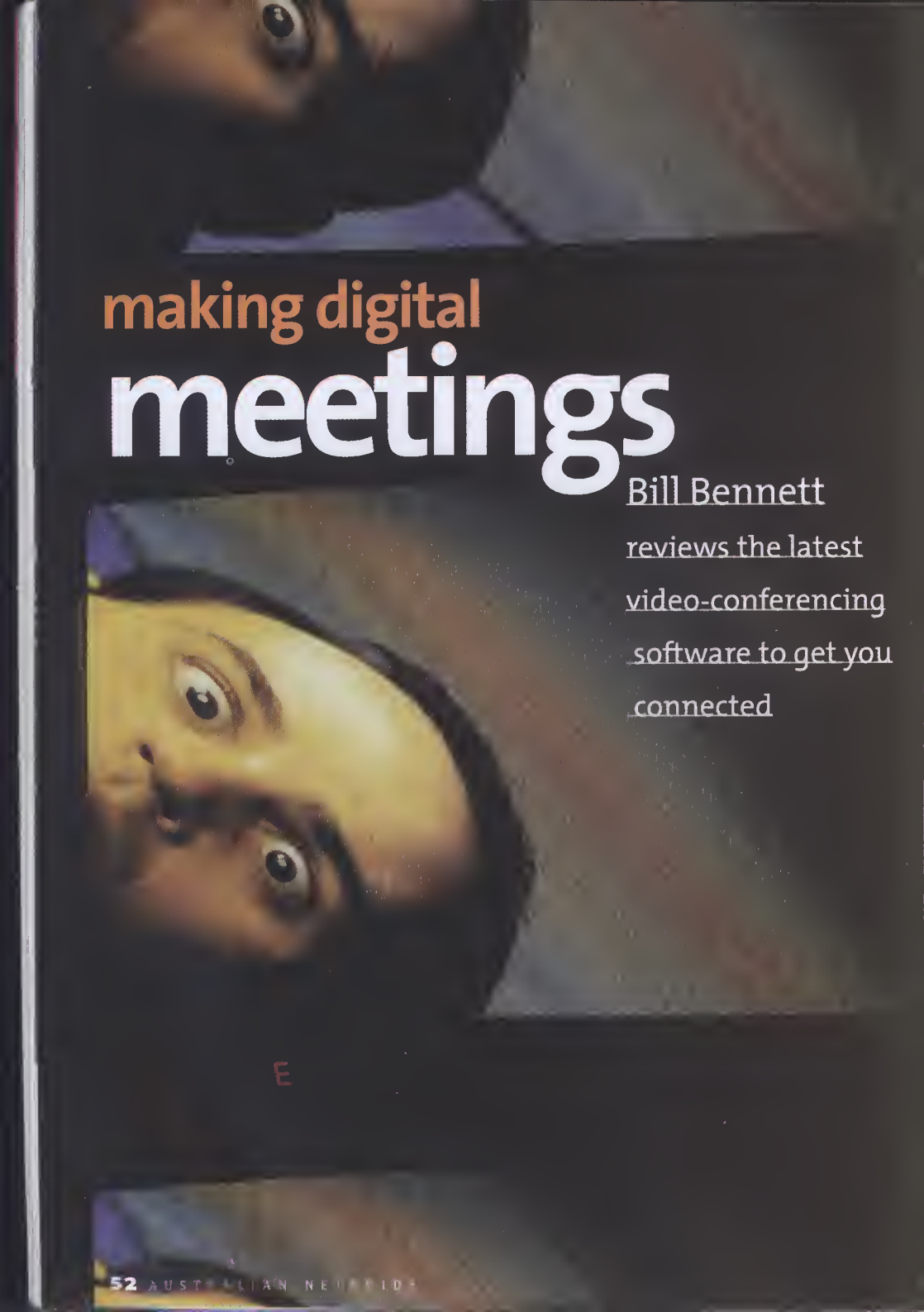
STIFFNESS & BACKACHES

Warning

MegaSaver deal won't hurt your bank balance. Availability is limited
to use starter kit. But remember, if pain persists see a doctor.

Email
sales@ozemail.com.au

rs are used; v) unused hours don't carry forward to the next month; vi) max. session length may apply; vii) conditions apply. OAD3243/ANG



making digital meetings

Bill Bennett reviews the latest video-conferencing software to get you connected

In my grandfather's day, "what the butler saw" machines were a popular entertainment. For one penny, Edwardians could squint through a tiny slot and see jerky, poorly defined pictures flick giving a vague impression of movement. Today's home computer video-conferencing systems offer much the same. Overall, picture quality is barely adequate and sound quality is often worse. Images vary between thumbnail and picture postcard sizes. Despite vendor claims, if you get more than 3 frames per second, you're doing well. You might just get a continuous audio stream. Most video-conferencing means moving pictures and text-based chatting.

This doesn't quite square with consumer expectation. Most of us already have a pretty good idea of what we think video-conferencing should be like. We've seen it on TV and at the movies. Basically, it's a form of telecommunication where you can talk to and view one or more other person(s) at a time. A camera and microphone connected to a computer at one end, take images and sound in, which are then compressed and streamed through the Net via the video-conferencing software. The sound and images are then processed and delivered to your target at the other end, and vice versa.

When Jean-Luc Picard tells Star Fleet Command the Klingons are attacking or when George Jetson tells his wife he'll be late home for tea, they flick a switch and speak directly to the other party with high-resolution pictures and good quality sound.

Okay, so Mr Jetson maybe a cartoon and, like I keep telling people, Star Trek isn't real. Nevertheless, media images of video-conferencing are, shall we say, a little optimistic.

Communicating this way can be a diverting way to spend an evening, it's not something you should take seriously. At least not for now, though things are improving fast. When I last looked at video-conferencing two years ago you'd be lucky to get 1 frame a minute and audio was horrible.

Given these shortcomings, you might think home computer-based video-conferencing isn't worth the bother. However, there are some very useful applications. Things can get a bit nerdy at times, though the keenest group of users are hardly geeks. Distant grandmothers are big fans of this technology. For example, my Mother, who lives near London, recently purchased her first computer and has already asked for advice on buying a camera.

Security is another popular application. Video is cheaper than hiring a guard. There are parents who use video-conferencing to watch over their sleeping babies.

Video-conferencing first became practical on Apple computers. Even now the Macintosh is generally better at handling sound and graphics. Many of the products mentioned in this review started out on planet Mac. For instance, the Logitech QuickCam VC I used to test software has a strong Mac pedigree. So does CU-SeeMe, probably the best all-round package. As a rule, Mac users can expect better performance than PC users.

While running faster hardware can improve performance, the real problem lies in communications bandwidth. This is the technical term for the speed at which data signals are sent.

One reason why video-conferencing is more popular overseas is that people in other countries tend to have better access to faster communications.

VIDEO CONFERENCING

Here in Australia, most Internet users connect via a modem and a telephone line. This severely hampers video performance.

Even 56K modems only receive at that speed. They send at 33.6K, if you are lucky. In practice 33.6K is likely to be theoretical maximum. And anyway, the pictures you see might be sent at 28.8K. Remember pictures have to go up and down the cable – this effectively halves the bandwidth. If all that bandwidth was available, you might be able to receive small, postcard-sized images at the rate of about six or seven per minute. But the sound channel and other overheads reduce this to a theoretical three or four frames per minute, hence the attraction of video images and text chatting.

If you have access to ISDN, cable Internet or some other fast technology, or if you run video across a local area network, you can expect a much better experience. However, this review is focused on the kind of technology foundation most ANG readers are currently using.

There are two approaches to video-conferencing. Professional products demand high-bandwidth links and deliver good quality sound and video. At the low-bandwidth end of the market, software attempts to make up for the lack of bandwidth by compression and decompression algorithms. This tends to require powerful PCs, though you can get decent results on a fast 486.

On the whole, though, you would need at least a 133MHz Pentium with 48Mb of RAM, plenty of available hard disk, a 33.6K or better modem and a good video card. In addition, most software requires a Soundblaster card. Almost all the software tested here should work within these specifications. In some circumstances faster machines may perform better, but if you are serious about video-conferencing you'd be better off buying a low-end PC or an iMac and investing in higher bandwidth.

The only other hardware 'must have' is a camera. Most cameras come with all the software you need for video-conferencing. Given the restrictions of some software packages you should ensure that the bundled software meets your specific needs.

Another useful application for the same technology is to save the video as a file, compress it (using a program such as WinZip) and attach it to email. That way you can send short video mail (say around 10 seconds for a 100Kb video file) and have it play at the other end clearly without any hitches. Software from Alaris (**www.alaris.com.au**) called Videogram is an example of technology that let's you send video mail. It's not real-time conferencing, but it's still useful.

Each of the video-conferencing systems reviewed offered a way to find other users to talk

to. For example, VDONet runs a Web site known as ClubVDO. While some systems are built using an open standard, which means you can talk to people using a different system, the contact services are largely proprietary. In other words, you'll mainly get to talk to others using the same software. In fact, in many cases, the ability to connect with other users is an integral part of the software.

The exception to this is when you link to others using Microsoft's NetMeeting (**www.microsoft.com/australia/products/prodref/113_ov.htm**). This is a free program from Microsoft, which allows you to conference either in text chat, voice or video.

The Packages:

ICUII version 2.5.1

(pronounced I See You Two)

Developer	Cybration.
Price	US$24.95 purchase online.
Web site	**www.icuii.com**
Rating	✪✪✪✪✪

Claiming to work with any Pentium computer in as little as 8Mb of RAM and with only a 14.4K modem, ICUII is ambitious to say the least. It also claims to support video at a resolution of 640 by 480 and MMX optimisation. On my 150MHz Pentium with 48Mb RAM and a 33.6K modem it certainly delivered the goods. I could only test lower resolution 320 by 240 images, but I managed to receive really clear images and the best frame rate.

ICUII has a clean interface and offered the best video clarity of any software tested. The software's audio performance was less impressive; but that would be true of all packages tested. The sound would occasionally break up. While the software is robust enough, the ICUII Web site and help features are less polished. Overall, ICUII is an impressive system.

HoneyCam

Publisher	Honey Software
Price	$29.95
Web site	**www.honeysw.com**
Free download	yes, 2.3Mb
Rating	✪✪

With its old fashioned Windows 3.1 style interface and its IRC style approach, HoneyCam is clearly focused on the hobby end of the video-conferencing market. And with a downloadable file size of just 2.3Mb, it is the most compact software reviewed. HoneyCam uses a non-standard format, so you can only chat with other people using the same software. On the positive side, Honey Software claims the software can cope with up to five people chatting in the same video-conference. I couldn't test this ability, but if it works, it will make HoneyCam a powerful tool for users who need to communicate with more than one other person at a time.

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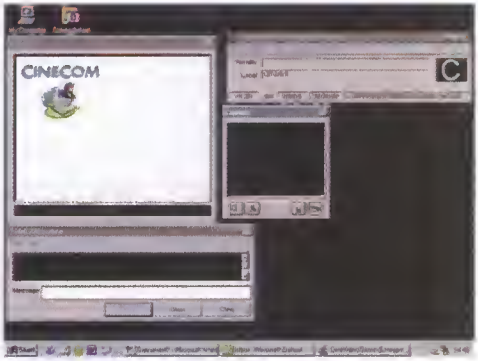
In practice, I found HoneyCam simply didn't work. I spent a number of hours configuring and reconfiguring the hardware. I never got so far as seeing my own image on screen. What's more, I couldn't connect to a server and see or hear anyone else. Online support didn't respond to my requests within a week.

CineVideo/Direct

Developer CineCom
Price US$49.95
Web site **www.cinecom.com**
Rating ✪✪

While the promise of CineVideo/Direct looks good, this package didn't really work for me. For example, I could view myself on screen but I appeared in



a tiny window in what appeared to be only 4-bit grey scale. The effect was of a ghostly outline (no eyes or discernable features). I never managed to see anyone at the other end of the line. Indeed, the software could not make a connection to any server. It's a pity I couldn't get any results because the user interface looked comfortable.

According to the documentation, this program works with Windows 3.1, so it may be of interest to users of older hardware. The software uses proprietary standards so you can only communicate with others using the same software. What's more, you can't send voice and video at the same time. One nice feature of CineVideo is that you can use the software to communicate even if you don't have a camera or soundcard. That's if you can connect to anything.

CU-SeeMe 3.1.2

Publisher White Plains
Price US$69 for downloadable version
US$89 plus shipping for boxed version
Demo **www.wpine.com/Products/CU-SeeMe/**
Rating ✪✪✪✪✪

At this price, you'd expect CU-SeeMe to be good. In many ways it is. The program conforms to all

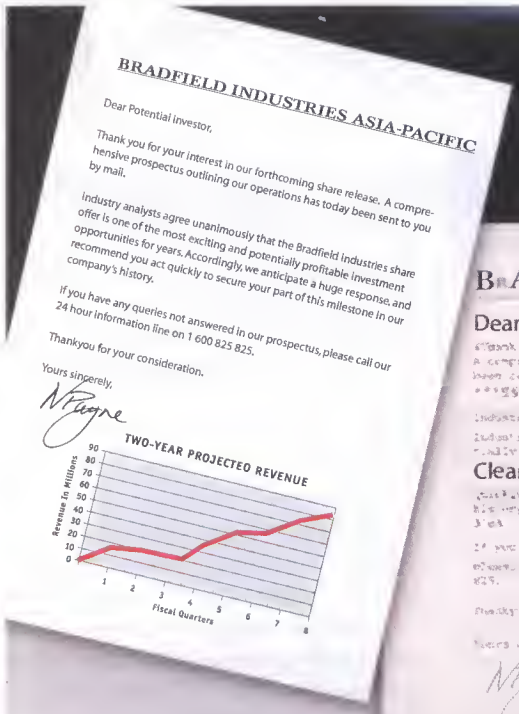
also on the market

iPhone
www.vocaltec.com
Solid consumer product for viewing audio & video content for both Mac & PC users.

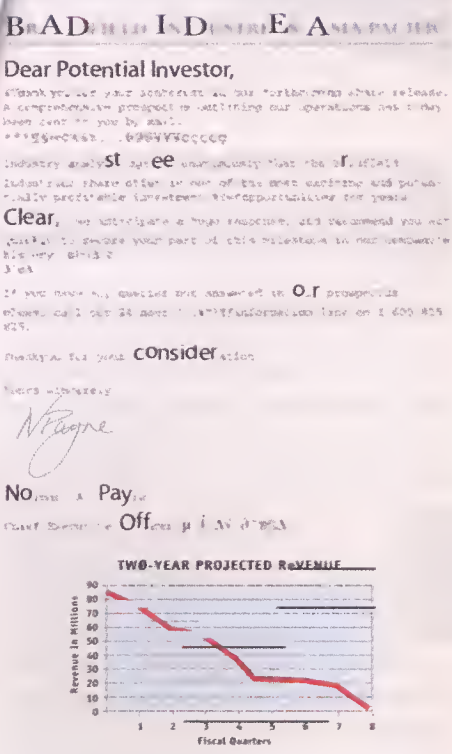
Inet Cam
www.inetcam.com
For sending live video across the Net.

Intel's videophone
www.intel.com/product/videophone/
The chip company has discovered an application requiring us to buy faster processors.

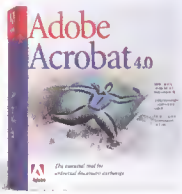
Rendez-Vous
www-sop.inria.fr/rodeo/rv/
Barely comprehensible video-conferencing software for serious tech heads.



YOU SEND



BUT THEY GET



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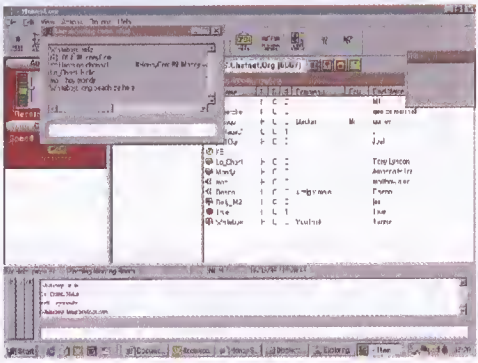


standards, so you can communicate with people using different software. It's fully compatible with Microsoft NetMeeting, which means you can find people using that software, then chat to them using CU-SeeMe. It allows you to view multiple remote cameras in a real online conference. In short, it delivers all the promise of video-conferencing.

In practice CU-SeeMe performs well, the individual windows might be small, but seeing four or five other people all at once is quite an experience. Like most of the other packages, users tended to choose text rather than audio chat mode. CU-SeeMe is also available for the Macintosh.

VDOPhone Internet 3.5 →

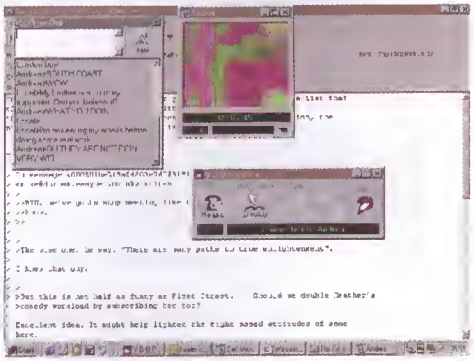
Publisher VDONet
Price US$49 for downloadable
version Also Professional version at US$69
Download from www.vdo.net
Rating ★★★★

VDOPhone is a polished, standards-based package that integrates with Microsoft NetMeeting. VDONet supplies a lot of its technology to other software companies and quite possibly has the best audio compression of any product in this survey. The video-conferencing software, while competent, only performed averagely in tests and has the least appealing user interface. VDO operates a VDO club, which will put you in touch with other users for conferencing. When I last checked these clubs, the majority of sub-groups (even those aimed at family audiences) were full of men and women cruising for sexual partners — not for the kiddies!

In summary...

Testing this software was a lot of fun. Clearly video-conferencing has potential, despite its drawbacks. Of the five products tested here only three worked as expected. My personal preference is for ICUII, which, on my machine, delivered the best results. CU-SeeMe is the best in terms of features. Both are worth buying. VDOPhone performed well, but can't be recommended for reasons outlined below.

Finally, a word of warning. Most products come with directory services at sites that allow you to find other people to video-conference with. In some cases sexual predators use these services. Even if you're not offended by what you see, your family might be. Take care.



NEW TO THE NET>> secure servers

How do you know the information you send to a shopping site is safe? Nigel Horrocks has the answers

SO YOU ARE FINALLY tempted to buy something online but still nervous about sending credit card information across the telephone line. The most secure online shopping there is – and nothing can be fully guaranteed – occurs over what is known as a secure server.

If you're at a site and you enter a page stored on a secure server, your browser should alert you to the fact that transactions are now "secure" (unless you've asked it not to warn you any longer). Another way of checking for secure transactions is to watch the bottom of your browser window. An icon along the lines of an open padlock or a broken key should be visible when you are viewing sites on the Net. A closed padlock or unbroken key indicates the current page is being sent to you from a "secure" server (some browsers also place a blue line across the top of the content window when a site is secure).

Secure means the information you are about to give, including credit card numbers, is "encoded" or "encrypted". This sensitive information will be scrambled using a code which is, for all intents and purposes, impossible to decode unless you have the key. And the key is held by the secure server. If for some reason someone is monitoring the information you send, it will appear to them as gibberish.

The most popular form of encryption software uses a protocol called the Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) and was designed by Netscape to allow secure communication over the Internet. There are a number of other systems appearing or under development, but a survey earlier this year suggested a high proportion of sites where goods can be purchased are not secure. If you have any doubts, you should email the site and ask.

Shopping carts

Some shopping sites provide "shopping carts", along the same lines as physical supermarkets. Once you invoke a cart by adding something to it, it remembers what you've put in it, and allows you to add and remove items using controls or buttons. When you reach the "checkout", you'll be presented with a list of goods you've put into the

shopping cart. At this stage you should still have the opportunity to remove any goods you decide you don't want after all.

Many overseas shopping sites are annoying in that you don't know the cost of freight until late in the process, perhaps even till after you've supplied your credit card information. After this, however, there should still be an opportunity to change your mind if the postage rate turns out to be too expensive. One firm sent me an email with the postage information on it and then awaited my confirmation before proceeding with the order. If you're in doubt, try looking around the site for a page detailing terms and conditions or international orders – these often have links to information on shipping rates.

When using shopping sites, some may offer completion of the order by fax or phone, instead of online. This is usually an alternative option for those who are nervous about entering credit card details online. However, while this may make you feel better, giving credit card details by phone or fax is still not foolproof.

The Internet offers an even safer method of transferring your details through the use of a secure server. If fast, easy and convenient shopping is what you're after, dial-in and away you go. Happy shopping.

Looking forward to your family exploring a new world on the Internet?

DEFINITIONS

HTML The language which instructs a Web browser where to position elements on a page.

Internet aka the Net or cyberspace
A worldwide network of many thousands of computers. You connect to this network when you connect to your ISP, usually via a modem.

Link or hyperlink Like a bookmark, links usually appear in blue and underlined (they can also be graphics). When you click a link, another Web page opens in your browser.

URL uniform resource locator
Eg **www.netguide.com.au**, the alpha-numeric address of a site on the Web.

World Wide Web The part of the Internet which consists of graphical/textual pages called sites, Web sites or home pages.

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startlearning

Join James Baker on a journey of dicovery as you create a Web site

THIS MONTH WE LAUNCH a new series on designing for the Internet. This is not just the tips and tricks you'll find all through this magazine, but a dedicated column stepping through the process of building a Web site, from go to whoa! Over the upcoming months we're going to teach you how to put a site together by doing just that. We'll start, as they say, at the very beginning, and take it from there.

Before we start our Web site, we're going to need somewhere to put it. It'll work just fine on your hard disk, but not many people are going to get the chance to see it there. So let's look at the basics of a Web site; what is it, how does it work, how do you get to it, and where does that weird name come from?

To do this, we'll have to take a couple of things for granted. As a reader of this magazine, you probably have Internet access already. You have an account with an ISP, a computer and a modem, and a browser for looking at Web sites. Pretty straightforward requirements really, but if you have all these, you're ready to start.

What is a Web site?

Despite the complexity of the wondrous sites we take you to in this magazine, a Web site is, deep down, a relatively simple beast.

A site exists by virtue of three basic factors. Firstly, it needs to be made up of one or more files written using HTML (Hypertext Markup Language). Secondly, those files need to reside on a computer that is accessible to other computers, and runs special software that allows browsers to look at those HTML files. Thirdly, those files need to follow a naming convention that allows individual files to be read, and the site as a whole to be accessed.

A Web site can be as simple as one single page, or file, so let's give an example of just that to explain the concepts.

Make a page

The first thing I have to do to create a site is to have an HTML page. We'll go way deep into the nitty-gritty of HTML in upcoming issues, but for now just pretend the following means something.

```
<html>
<body>
goodbye cruel world
</body>
</html>
```

There, that wasn't too bad now, was it. We now have a page of HTML that is the kernel of our Web site. (To prove that, enter the five lines above into Notepad or SimpleText, and save it as hello.html. Start up your Web browser and using the command to open a local file, open hello.html. You've now given birth to your very first Web page.)

Okay, that's the first step. Next we need to put this file somewhere, and this is where your ISP comes into it. You don't have to use the ISP you connect through to host your Web site, but most ISPs now offer a deal where you can put up a certain number of files (measured by the disk space they take up) as part of your package.

For this file to be read, you will be given a directory in which to put it. A very basic Web hosting account will give you a directory which probably has the same name as your user ID. So, if you are bob@isp.com.au, your Web directory – the area of hard disk on the ISP's machine where you get to put your HTML files – will be called /bob or perhaps /~bob (the / denotes a directory, and the ~ indicates a user's home directory).

This directory, and all others in it, will sit in a directory that is known to the computer as a public HTML file area. Requests to download pages to a browser are made using a protocol known as HTTP (Hypertext Transfer Protocol). These requests must be answered by software that 'serves' those pages when requested. The HTTP server is only allowed to serve requests for files to come from specific locations due to security precautions, hence the location of your directory.

So, you have a file sitting in a directory known as 'bob' in the public Web directory on an ISP known as isp.com.au. To look at that file, the browser has to be told to use the HTTP protocol to request it. To get the file hello.html we tell the browser to go get it by typing: **http://www.isp.com.au/bob/hello.html**

Look familiar? It should do, because virtually every Web site uses that naming convention or a variation of it. We'll look at the more complex variations later on, but for now let's look at one of the simpler ones, our very own Web site.

Domain names

Entering **http://www.netguide.com.au** will get you to one of the best little Web sites in the country, but you'll notice the naming is slightly different. *NetGuide* is not an ISP, and nor is there a name of a file or directory in the address. There are two things going on here that make the *NetGuide* site different from the example above.

Firstly, netguide.au.com is a registered domain name. This means that, while the site does actually reside at an ISP, it doesn't require that ISP's name in its address. When you type the name in your browser, that name is handed to the domain name server at your ISP, which relates it to an IP (Internet Protocol) address, which is actually just a series of numbers. But because *NetGuide* has registered a domain, that name can be mapped to the ISP's directory where our files sit. When the name is requested, the DNS registry knows to direct that request to our directory, bypassing the need to put in the ISP's address.

The reason no file name needs to be specified has to do with the server. If you browse the *NetGuide* site, you'll see that in the address box at the top of your browser, the address actually has the words index.html at the end of it. The Web

server our ISP uses has a default file it looks for if there is no file name specified. In this case it is index.html, but it could just as easily be default .html, or blah.html. We cleverly call the front page index.html to save you the effort of having to type it in. (A file that doesn't use the default naming convention can still be read, but its name must be typed in.) For example, try typing: **www.netguide.com.au/hello.html**

Using the basic ISP account described above, you don't have to worry about a domain registration. Your ISP has already done that (that's the **www.isp.com.au** part), and what you have is a sub-domain of their domain (the /bob part). That means you must call your site by the name the ISP gives you for your directory, but it is an inexpensive and simple way of doing things. Getting your own domain name means you can call your site what you like, assuming the name is still available (and last time I looked, **www.bob.com.au** was still available). But this will require some additional technical prowess, an ISP that is willing to set it up for you (remember, those pages still have to sit somewhere), and an annual charge. To find out more about setting up a domain name, visit the NetRegistry (**www.netregistry.com.au**) or Internet Names Australia (**www.ina.com.au**), where you can begin the process of registering your name.

International flavour

You are probably familiar with the naming style **www.bob.com**. This address (which actually belongs to a computer at Microsoft and is not publicly accessible) is hosted in the US, and because of the American origins of the Internet, has the privilege of not needing a country code attached, the **.au** bit. This makes for a simpler name to remember, and also adds an international feel to your site's name. For small companies wanting to look like big ones, the .com naming can really add an impression. To get one however, you will have to host your site with an ISP or virtual hosting service based in the US or using a US service itself, and apply for your domain name through the InterNIC (**www.internic.com**) the United States' answer to our registries.

So, those are the basics for finding somewhere to put your Web site. Contact your ISP for pricing plans, and check how much traffic and storage space is allowed. If you have a particularly popular site with an ISP that charges high rates for 'hits' to that site, you could end up spending a lot of money. If you want your own domain name contact your ISP to check its requirements for hosting domains, then apply for the domain name of your choice from one of the two registries. Alternatively, look at hosting with a service that will allow you to use a .com name and register it with InterNIC.

Whichever way you go, you'll now have a directory on a Web server that you can call your own. Next month we'll show you how to get your files onto the server, look at how best to structure subdirectories, how to link files together, and begin to look at the structure of an HTML page.

FARFETCHED

Raewyn Whyte gets a scent of Cajun cooking and hot jazz at the New Orleans Mardi Gras...

>ain't misbehavin'

NEW ORLEANS IS the place where the good times roll throughout the six weeks of Mardi Gras (**www.mardigrasday.com**). It's an extravagant festival of parties, street parades and balls starting with Carnival and ending at dawn after Mardi Gras night.

Street parades are a competitive tradition, with local Krewes vying for accolades. The floats are 100 feet long and carry masked riders who toss trinkets into costumed crowds. Live broadcasts of Mardi Gras events can be seen at (**www.mardigrasneworleans.com/mardlive.html**), replete with local celebrities, hot jazz and the latest fashions during January.

The streets are closed to traffic and parking, and hotels and restaurants are booked way in advance, so plan ahead. New Orleans tourist sites (**www.experienceneworleans.com** and **www.bestofneworleans.com**) provide all the information you need.

New Orleans is the home of jazz, which originated there in 1900. Nightclubs and jazz joints are plentiful, online bookings can be made for jazz events at The Virtual Concert Line (**concerts.satchmo.com**) and there are jazz cruises on the Steamboat Natchez (**www.steamboatnatchez.com/jazzcruise.html**). Zydeco dancehalls and alternative music venues are plentiful and are listed in the Louisiana directory (**www.neosoft.com/~offbeat/lmd/**).

There's lots to see and do. If you're an Anne Rice fan, explore the mansions, churches and cemeteries haunted by her vampires, and the magical properties of the city she loves, on an official Anne Rice tour (**www.cnn.com/TRAVEL/DESTINATIONS/9701/anne.rice.tour/**). Take a swamp tour (**www.honeyislandswamp.com**), visit a plantation, tour the city's 42 cemeteries, stroll through Jackson Square artists' quarter, or join the pilgrims at St Roch Chapel.

Don't forget to indulge in local Cajun and Creole cuisine. The New Orleans online restaurant guide provides plenty of options (**www.wisdom.com/la/rg/rmenu.htm**). Or make your own gumbo and beignets, jambalaya and etoufee (**www.gatewayno.com/Cuisine/cajun.html** and **www.neworleansweb.org**).

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SHOPGUIDE

Claire McFarland relives her childhood as she shops for the latest dolls to hit the market

>object of desire

Feral Cheryl

RRP $66.50

Feral Cheryl (**www.feralcheryl.com.au**) is the "real chicks" doll. Not a splash of pink in sight here and none of those tortured looking feet either, thank-you very much. Chezza is your natural doll, wearing her alternative lifestyle with pride. And there'll be none of that hair preening going on because Cheryl has a healthy head of dreadlocks. She's one of the joyful toys to come out of Australia, a doll that's a realistic portrayal of the feminine body. At the risk of scandalising *NetGuide* readers, I'm pleased to let you know that Cheryl has something every adult female has which has been curiously lacking in her Barbie doll cousins — more body hair than you can imagine. Someone's definitely thinking outside the square. You'll love her not for beauty's sake but for the sense of irony.

Granny May's

www.grannymays.com.au/cgi-bin/nc/gm/beaniekids.tam

Granny May's has got 'em. Beanie Kids that is — those floppy animals stuffed with beans that have been taking the world by storm. If the growing number of Beanie fan sites collectors have is any indicator, this product is hot. Granny May's has a selection of 55 beanie kids, priced from $6.95 to $11.95 for the variety that will speak to you. Granny May's will charge you a maximum delivery price of $10 for any orders under $100. Orders over $100 are shipped free.

Sooky Dolls

www.sookydolls.nu

The head down stance of the Sooky Dolls says it all. They are sooks, and they look so cute standing in a corner — that would be your naughty variety. An Australian concept, these dolls are more for decorative purposes than to play with. They do make great conversation pieces though. I mean it's not everyone who has a head-bowed doll banished to the corner of their living room. The beauty of ordering direct is the ability to pick and choose combinations of clothing and hair colour, allowing you to have a truly unique Sooky Doll. They cost $79 each, and delivery is free around Australia.

GO SHOPPING
At shopping.ninemsn.com.au
ninemsn

NET TRENDS

Flocking to the Net

A survey by an Illinois company reported by eMarketer (**www.emarketer.com/estats/0222 99_cia.html**) says 89% of Internet users live in 15 countries. The Computer Industry Almanac says 147 million people use the Net-a 58% increase in the last year. The US still has more people than anywhere else-70 million. Japan – initially a slow starter to the Net – has moved into second place followed by UK. Europe has 36.2 million. It predicts 320 million Net users worldwide by year-end 2000 and over 720 million users by year-end 2005. It says as the US market becomes saturated with Internet users, its percentage of total worldwide users will invariably drop.

"Geographically isolated countries" – listed as Australia and New Zealand – are expected to experience quicker penetration rates on a per capita basis than other countries because it says the Net has already replaced the use of several telephone, mail and fax services which are relatively expensive .

More shop online

A new survey about online shopping by US research company Zona (**www.intelliquest.com**) shows a massive leap in those using e-commerce. Results show online Christmas – January holiday spending by Internet users rose from an average of – (all amounts given in US dollars) – $216 last year to $629 in 1998, a percentage growth of 191%, with 58% of the sampled buyers having spent nothing online in 1997.

Leading the way was the over-50 age group. Spending for respondents aged 50-54 on average grew 545% ($626 compared with $97) while spending for those over 55 rose 547% ($1819 vs $281 last year). Curiously, while the under-25 age group is widely believed to be much more Net-savvy, this group's online holiday spending rose only 36% ($210 vs last year's $154).

Though spending by men surpassed that of women by an average of $707 to $543, women's online buying rose far more dramatically, up 308% over last year compared with increases by men of 145%.

NET COOL

* **IE 5.0** > with radio & related links (www.microsoft.com/windows/ie/ie5/)
* **Internet2** > faster and with more grunt (www.internet2.edu)
* **Pentium III** > offering richer 3D (www.intel.com.au)
* **Gumby** > immortalised in cyberspace (www.gumbyclub.com)
* **MP3 rocks** > search for a tune (mp3.lycos.com)
* **Arts and letters daily** > quality on the Net (www.cybereditions.com/aldaily/)
* **Chess heaven** > great moves revealed (www.chesslab.com)
* **Star Wars** > a new generation of heroes (www.starwars.com)
* **New digital audio** > getting better all the time (www.vqf.com)
* **Rugby heaven** > get the latest on the Super 12 (www.rugbyheaven.com.au)
* **Communicator 9110** > Nokia's latest gadget upgrade (www.nokia.com)

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It's too easy...

To save your weary fingers the trouble of typing each site address into your Web browser, we've gone and done it for you. Point your browser to **www.netguide.au.com** and follow the link to Top 50, where you'll find all this month's URLs!

TOP 50

Paid to surf >> Daniel Fallon & the NetGuide team

Olympics 70
Lord Of The Rings 72
Magnets 74
Motorsports 76
Dreams 78
Water 80
Dogs 82

Site of the Month 84

HOTSPOT

Sydney 2000

www.sydney.olympic.org

This is the official site of the 2000 Olympics, and it's the best place to find out news and related events information online. If you've always dreamed of carrying the Olympic torch, you can nominate yourself here. You can also take a closer look at the sports included in next year's big event – there's everything from archery through to wrestling. The part on ticketing includes pricing information and how you can plan a three or four day tour of the Games. There's a shopfront for all the different types of Games merchandise you can purchase too. If that's not enough, you can also check out information on the different venues being used.

Olympic RTA

www.orta.nsw.gov.au/transport.html

If you've been to Sydney recently, and been stuck in traffic, you're probably wondering how this great harbour city is going to cope during the Olympics. The NSW Olympic Roads and Transport Authority has the job to seamlessly move great masses of people between events and ensure the whole thing doesn't become one big traffic jam. If you have plans to travel to the Olympics, visit this site to find out about the public transport strategy that is going to save the day.

IOC

www.olympic.org

Home of the International Olympic Committee, the governing body of the modern Olympic movement, this site is Flash enhanced and comes in both English and French languages. It is divided into four main sections, covering the history of the Games, the future of the Games, museum with a wide variety of seemingly un-museum like parts, such as the gallery of assorted images in the Virtual Expo. You can send Olympic Webcards to your friends at the site to keep the spirit alive.

Athens 2004

www.athens2004.gr

The show just keeps rolling on, this time to where the Olympic legend began back in Athens, Greece. At this site, read about the proposal to revive the Ancient Olympiad — a four year cultural celebration that will begin in 2001 and culminate with the Games of the 28th Olympiad in 2004. There are also plenty of audio and video highlights of related events in Athens at the site, which can be accessed via RealPlayer.

The Olympic Club

www.theolympicclub.com.au

Everyone wants to be a part of the Olympic spirit, and the organisers of the Olympic Club are promoting it as a good way of getting involved. Members get the chance to win tickets to the Games, interact with our athletes at events in the build up as well as receive a Welcome Kit, which includes an Olympic Magazine and Video. The club aims to support the Australian Olympic Team and assist our athletes to realise their dreams. You can join the Olympic Club online by filling out the form and providing your credit card details.

AOC

www.australian.olympic.org.au

The Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) has seen a lot of bad press of recent, and it would be wishing to refocus the public's mind back on the positives of the great event about to unfold next year. One way to do this is by visiting its site. Here you'll find information on the Olympic Job Opportunities Programme, the Sydney 2000 Gold Medal Plan and the role of the AOC and IOC and its members. You'll also find links for submissions and reports (such as the one offered by the World Conference on Doping in Sport). As you can see by the clock at the site, the count down is on.

Minister for the Olympics

www.magna.com.au/~knight/knight.html

The NSW Minister for the Olympics, Michael Knight, is online at this address. For those looking back at significant events, you can access the Record of Office here. From environment strategies, to financing, to NBC broadcasting rights, this site has plenty on the nitty-gritty history of the development towards the next Olympics in Sydney. There's also a very handy links section covering everything from sports to industry.

LORD OF THE RINGS

HOTSPOT

The Arrival of Gandalf, by Darrell Sweet

Lord of the Rings Graphic Walkthrough

www.ptialaska.net/~tjweiss/tolkien/

This site is a refreshing change from the typical home page style of other LOTR sites. The Lord of the Rings Graphic Walkthrough is a beautifully-illustrated online story with screen-sized pages of text, each including a graphic depiction of that segment of the story. The site consists of a total of 90 pages, but they're not organised conveniently enough for printing. You'll need a flat-rate connection to get through this one.

The Lord of the Rings Quotes

members.aol.com/jtolkein/quotes.htm

This Web site takes The Lord of the Rings novel, cuts it to pieces and spits out the best parts, all for your convenient enjoyment. The site contains the most memorable quotes, songs and poetry from the JRR Tolkien stories. Most quotes are available for download as sound files from the BBC radio version and all are available in one handy download for offline listening. You'll also find a similar page with memorable quotes from Tolkien's novel *The Hobbit*.

Tolkien Fan Page

www.fortunecity.de/tatooine/tolkien/o/tolk-eng.html

At this Tolkien fan site you'll find pictures with motives from *The Lord of the Rings*, and information about JRR Tolkien, including a brief history of the writer and a biography of his work. While not very content rich, this site does contain a number of images from the brilliant art work by Angus McBride for the story, which you can download and use for all sorts of things. How about a LOTR desktop wallpaper?

↑ Songs and Poems in The Lord of the Rings

www.cep.unt.edu/songs/tolkien.html

This site provides extensive commentary on the songs and poems from *The Lord of the Rings*. With over 50 different verses, this page is fairly comprehensive and also includes links to other external resources for the different songs and poems, including associated illustrations and additional information. You can also send your own commentary to the author for inclusion in the page.

JRR Tolkien Page

www.geocities.com/Area51/Shire/9162/contents.html

While lacking a few important Web design elements, including a proper page title, this site is a fully comprehensive *Lord of the Rings* site with much to offer within its pages. The site details many of the characters from both *The Lord of the Rings* and its predecessor *The Hobbit*. Each character is profiled with a brief introduction covering who they are, where they are from and what part in the story they play, included with illustrations.

Lord of the Rings

www.cadvision.com/heilmang/lotr.html

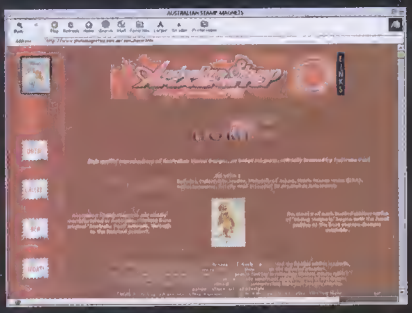
As with most personal Web sites, this one portrays many of the elements of a typical personal home page — flashing images, backgrounds that make the actual page content hard to read, etc. But we forgive them and commend their efforts for delivering the useful information. This site is a gallery of images from The Lord of the Rings and includes the author's descriptions, and interpretation and analyses for each.

↑ Weta Ltd

www.wetafx.co.nz

This is the site for Peter Jackson's Weta company, where you can join the queues of the wannabe-rich and famous all applying to be in the crew for the three-film screen adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings*. The workshop staff — the ones making costume designs and armour — are already being hired and others will be recruited over the next year. If you're already rich and famous and prefer to be just a moviegoer, bookmark the site to watch the movie's progress.

HOTSPOT



Fridge Magnets Link Centre

www.photomagnetics.com.au

Here you'll find reproductions of Australian postage stamps in the form of fridge magnets, officially licensed by Australia Post, and as seen in Stamp News, Woman's Day and Philately of Japan (try saying that if you're Japanese). The stamp designs give these magnets a classy look, rather than the trashy plastic one you might be used to. Subtle colours and attractive backgrounds give this site a professional, expensive aura. Check out the neat JavaScript status bar message: a cute Pacman widget that "eats" the words scrolling across it. Little things...

Kevin Savetz's Fridge Magnets

www.savetz.com/fridge/

Use this jumble of variously-coloured virtual magnets to leave a message on Kevin's fridge. They're reminiscent of those big toy letters from your childhood. You remember: the ones that slide off and get lost underneath the fridge. You can type a message, thus magically rearranging the magnets. "I'll be gone a few days. Anyone I should wave to as I drive thru?" asked the fridge the last time I visited. There's a record of previous messages, for the historians among us. Judging by the list, Kevin's is one busy kitchen. And his fridge has been taking messages since September 1995.

Fabulous Fridge Foto Frames

reality.sgi.com/rightmind/fridge.html

Here's a good idea — Laura A. Henderson's magnets not only come in funky colours and shapes, you can use them to frame family photos, pictures of your favourite stars cut out of magazines, or reviews of your favourite Web sites from *NetGuide*'s Top 50. You get the idea. There are 18 designs available, they only

cost US$2.50 each and there's an order form here to download. Neat graphics, too — or "blinking swirly doos", as the artist describes them.

Pepsi Fridge Magnets

www.pepsi.co.uk/magnets/

Britain's Pepsi site has a visitors' book called Fridge Magnets, divided up into a series of modest discussion groups. Hostess Phat Cow says she'll be watching while visitors write stuff and stick it to her chest, and warns — "Don't try any funny stuff." This hasn't stopped intelligent folk like Barry contributing lewd remarks to the Spice Girls forum and commenting, "I have my own lookalike and fantasise over you every night". Righto. Watch out for pre-pubescent teenagers with one sweet tooth and room for growth upstairs.

Ice Box Originals

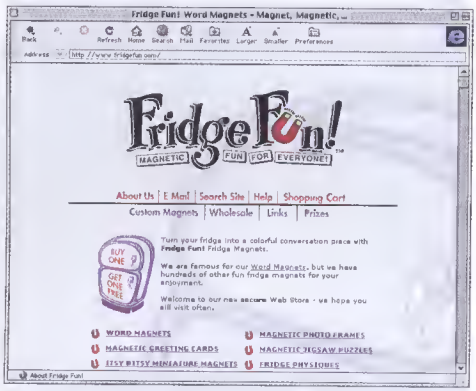
www.magnetplace.com

A selection of large and rather different refrigerator magnets. They're called Ice Box Originals and are just that — a piece of pop cultural history, perfect for 50s throwbacks. And at over 40 years old, many of them are genuine American antiques. There are radios, washing machines, automobiles and furniture made from original magazine advertisements, laminated and mounted on flexible magnetic sheeting. They are priced between about US$11 and $15. These are your true pulp magnets, "preserved for the next millennium". You may be attracted to them.

The Virtual Fridge

queue.ieor.berkeley.edu/~andryan/fridge/

The magnets may be virtual but the poetry is real enough. Although the Java version is best, there's a non-Java version, too. You can delete lines from poems to create new ones, use a common word list, comment on a poem or — just as you can with real fridge magnets — take a sonnet someone else took hours to compose and mess it all up. In the case of the virtual fridge, though, new creations are linked to originals, so works of beauty are not lost to posterity. When I visited, I found an accomplished verse about a raven and a bear.



Fridge Fun

www.fridgefun.com

Here you'll find word magnets and other magnetic doodads for your fridge, filing cabinet, gym locker or steel-plated head. And for every $20 purchase of Fridge Fun products you get $10 worth of magnets free. Designs include magnetic jigsaw puzzles, Beavis and Butt-Head and other licensed products like Marvel Comic characters. In urgent need of Yiddish word magnets? They've got 'em. There's also a non-magnetic product that clings to any clean, smooth surface. If you've got kids, you won't have any. The rest of you can stick these magnet-action gizmos to mirrors, glass doors, baths, showers and windows.

HOTSPOT

MOTORSPORTV8 Supercars

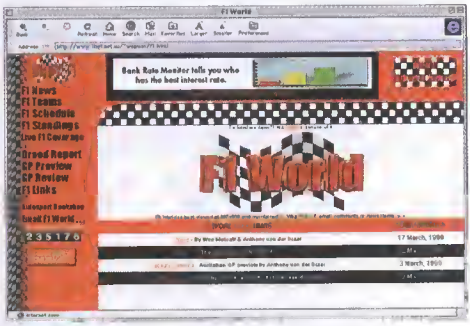
www.v8supercar.com.au

Dedicated to V8 motor racing, this site provides V8 lovers with plenty to be cheery about. Find out how much it costs to run one of these beasts – there's more than just engine, wheel and tyre expenses. There's also a calendar of this year's races as well as a results section for finished events. Access the V8 Supercar Team's Web sites, from Dick Johnson's home to the Holden Racing Team, in the links section of the site. The site features a gallery of images from this year's and last year's events. Visitors can also join a Supercar Club, which offers magazines, t-shirts and admission passes to the big races such as the Bathurst 1000.

Peter "Perfect" Brock

www1.loom.net.au/home/mikt/

Worth looking at, if only because it's Brock's personal home page — "Peter Brock emerged from a 'chook shed' on his parents' Hurstbridge property in 1968 with possibly the most dubious looking racing car ever — an Austin A30, powered by a Holden '179' engine". Brock, of course, has been synonymous with Holden and the annual Bathurst endurance race — this year as commentator, having hung up his helmet.



↑ F1 World

www.iinet.net.au/~wezman/f1.html

Read about the latest Forumla 1 news, view photos of the drivers and their nifty cars, and keep up-to-date with the season schedule and the current standing in the competition. During the big races you can also get a live feed of images through the site, which provides plenty of racing action. The Drood report provides an angry commentary on the happenings in the Formula 1 industry with some alternative motor racing views, while the Australian Grand Prix review explains what happened at the recent local meet. The links section is comprehensive, covering the official teams, drivers and other Formula 1 sites.

Aaron Slight

www.castrol-honda.com/frame/rid_frm.htm

This info-page devoted to the race-winning Kiwi Superbike phenomenon is located at the Castrol Honda site. There are quotes from Slight, who says riding for other teams never interested him. "I'm happy with the Castrol Honda team and we have the complete package to win the world title with the RC45 machine." In case you're unaware, Slight is from Masterton and, along with Colin Edwards will remain on the Castrol Honda team for the 1999 World Superbike championships. Sadly, he lost out to British rider Carl Fogerty after qualifying in tenth position in the final round of this year's World Superbike championship in Sugo, Japan.

The Motorsport Directory

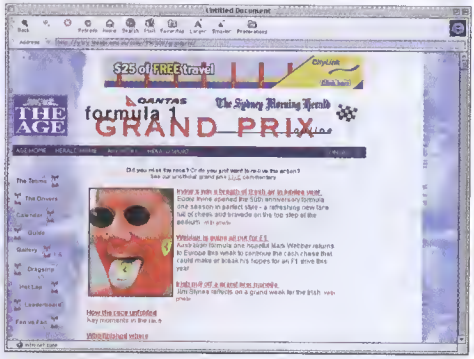
www.tne.net.au/hipbr/motorsport/index.html

At this site you'll find links to most of the four wheeled motor racing sports out there, including Auscar, Nascar, Indy, Formula, Touring and Karting. You'll also find sites covering motor racing jokes, motor trading sites, truck racing and motoring museums. Not a bad springboard for your motor surfing.

Michael Doohan Gallery

www.lisp.com.au/~mcintosh/glenn/

Michael Doohan is undoubtably one of the greatest ever 500cc motorcycle competitors this country has ever produced. This fan page devoted to the Honda racing celebrity offers visitors a pictorial of the speedy man in action. Relive some of Doohan's triumphant moments by clicking on the thumbnails to enlarge the pictures. Although it's image intensive, the site doesn't take too long to download.



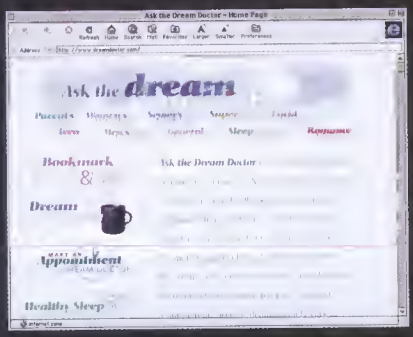
Forumla 1 – Grand Prix

www.theage.com.au/daily/990309/grandprix/

Melbourne-based and Fairfax owned newspaper *The Age* has a very handy resource here for motor racing fans. There's information on the teams, such as Ferrari and McLaren, and photos of and statics on their drivers, a calendar covering the coming races, a gallery of images from the Australian event held earlier this year and a very interesting Shockwave driven drag race, which let's visitors examine the speed difference between a variety of cars over 398 metres. There's also a map of the Victoria's Albian Park raceway and reviews of previous Formula 1 Grand Prixs.

DREAMS

HOTSPOT



Ask the Dream Doctor

www.dreamdoctor.com

Charles McPhee, aka the Dream Doctor, is here to educate readers about the unconscious mind as it is revealed during the nightly act of dreaming. Readers are able to submit their own dreams under a number of different age groups and dream types. For example, choosing Men's Dreams will give you such choices as Career, Relationships and Other Women. If you do submit the events of last night, your dream may be interpreted by the Dream Doctor, who seems to have a knack for finding meaning in the strangest of dreams. You'll never look at your dreams in the same way again.

Dream Central

www.sleeps.com

The goal of Dream Central is to help you understand the process of dreaming by providing extensive information on dream analysis and interpretation — i.e. what dreams are and how you can use them to help and understand yourself. You can learn how to dream more often by following the easy steps, and how to remember them when you wake up. Learn why we dream, and what your dreams mean through a process of identifying the common elements of dreams and tying them together to reveal a complete story.

DreamGate

www.dreamgate.com

Welcome to DreamGate, an Internet communications organisation with roots in the sleep and dreams community of research and study. DreamGate began as a communications project in 1994 to help professionals interested in the psychology, science and cultural aspect of dreams and dreaming. The DreamGate

site is content rich, with many places to visit depending on your specific interest. You'll find many articles, references and research findings here—you can even sign up for an online study class.

International Institute for Dream Research

home.interlynx.net/~dreambnk/home.html

This site has been developed to advance the study of dreams and to help people realise healthier and happier lives by the collection of dreams for study. The site provides news about advancements in dream research and acts as a forum for the exchange of ideas and answer questions about dreams. Here you can also submit your dreams for interpretation as the institute develops its bank of dreams for research purposes. The site also answers those commonly asked questions "why do we dream?", "what is a dream?" and "how do we understand our dreams?".

Sleepy Bear Dream Interpretation Site

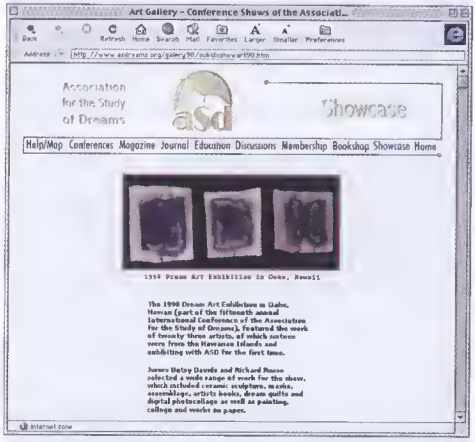
myenvoy.com/sleepybear/

At the Sleepy Bear site you can not only post your own dreams for interpretation and analysis, but also add your own interpretations of other people's dreams, which have been posted for scrutiny. Some of these dreams go beyond strange, but it can be comforting to know you're not the only one whose Dad turns into Lionel Ritchie and then has a shoot out with a policeman.

Dream Network Journal

www.dreamnetwork.net

It's something we all do and the Dream Network is an online vehicle for a growing grassroots network of individuals who believe in the value and power of dreams to help us individually. The Dream Network aims to encourage individuals to look for the purpose and meaning in their dreams. A full table of contents will guide you through the site and on many occasions you are invited to contribute your own experimental articles and dream experiences. Subscribe to the mailing list, send online postcards and download free information.



Assoc. for the Study of Dreams

www.asdreams.org

This non-profit organisation is a multi-disciplinary organisation dedicated to the pure and applied investigation of dreams and dreaming. The purpose of the ASD is to promote an awareness and appreciation of dreams in professional arenas and to encourage the research of the nature, function and significance of dreaming. You can join in the discussion and exchange your own information and ideas through the online forums and chat room. Further information can be found in the Q&A section.

WATER

HOTSPOT

Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric Authority

www.snowyhydro.com.au/smahome.html

This is a top stop to read and learn about one of Australia's greatest hydro-electric schemes. The system diverts water for irrigation west to the Murray and Murrumbidgee River systems as well as producing energy. Hydro schemes produce 'clean energy', avoiding the massive carbon dioxide emissions produced by other forms of electricity generation. One of the most informative sections of this site is the 'Power of Water', which covers the vision of the process, information on the Snowy Mountains region and how the scheme works.

CSIRO Land and Water

www.clw.csiro.au

Although there are no bells and whistles attached to this site, you'll be able to keep up-to-date with this government department's news on water issues. You can also read about the various research programs going on and its different centres of expertise, such as the CSIRO's Australian Research Centre for Water in Society. The CSIRO is where some of our brightest scientific minds work and you can check up on what some of them are doing here.

↑ Big Blue Exposure

www.bigblueexposure.com

"Marine awareness for the armchair and the adventurer." This is a colourful place. A marine naturalist, Heather Perry has made over 500 dives. She's encountered exotic species in the Red Sea, California's kelp forest and the Caribbean. With a degree in marine biology, she's also built a repertoire as a formidable undersea photographer — Big Blue Exposure brings the deep blue yonder into your home and incorporates Heather's shots from the Republic of Belau, Hawaii, Little Cayman, Californian Channel Islands and the Galapagos Islands.

↑ Ben Kreunen's Waterfall Page

www.bigbenpublishing.com.au/victoria/waterfall.html

This site is for those in search of waterfalls, with pictures from the Grampians and Alpine National Parks; The Otways (Carrisbrook Falls, Erskine, Sheoak and Grassy Creek); and Regional Melbourne, as well as maps, links and a guest book. The Virtual Victoria section has some neat graphics and 360-degree QuickTime panoramas of selected locations around Victoria — for information freaks, Ben also has a 'How I Did It' page. Nice graphics, too, in the weather section, with its raised, plaque-style photos and useful tips on the region's meteorology.

National Snow & Ice Data Centre

www-nsidc.colorado.edu

The National Snow and Ice Data Centre (NSIDC) is an information and referral centre, supporting polar and cryospheric research from the University of Colorado, and distributes snow and ice data, avalanche awareness and information on ice shelves and icebergs. It also maintains information about snow cover, glaciers, ice sheets, freshwater ice, sea ice, ground ice, permafrost, atmospheric ice, paleoglaciology and ice cores. ColdLinks is an NSIDC hot list of sites with snow and ice information.

Waterwatch Australia

www.waterwatch.org.au

Waterwatch is a national program aimed at monitoring water quality and developing strategies for improving the water quality of our great natural resources. Community, Landcare and school groups are the types of organisations that support Waterwatch. The site features information on water-quality monitoring programs, how to prepare a Waterwatch action plan and the organisation's code of practise. Member's can download a data entry program to help them perform simple analysis on the data collected on their local catchment. You'll find links to the state branches of the organisation as well.

Flash Flood!

stormsmart.wics.com/cadet/flood/

Floods are the most widespread of weather-related natural disasters and the biggest killer. They have the power to change the course of rivers and bury houses in mud. They combine destructive power with incredible speed and unpredictability. Learn more about the force of floods at this US site, which explains the difference between regular floods and flash floods, and find out what you should and shouldn't do during one. Flood Watch lets you search the Web for flash flood warnings and record what you find on your own weather map. A neat, uncluttered site that doesn't deal with this topic in a patronising "reality TV" way.

HOTSPOT

Australian Dogs Page

www.pcug.org.au/~sbaker/dogs.htm

This is a good bookmark for dog lovers across the country, with a comprehensive links page covering local breeds, State controlling bodies such as the Australian National Kennel Council and doggy sites of a more general nature. The site features a 'Directory of Australians with Doggy Interests', which has a list of people, their email addresses and specific doggy interests, to help people network. For people in the market for a dog, there's a helpful tips section on how to find one. There's also information and links to dog shows, a news section and news archives.

Dogs Downunder

wwwwwwins.net.au/dogsdownunder.html

68% of Australian households have a dog. The native breed, the Dingo, was there to greet the white man when he arrived with British breeds over 200 years ago. We've since developed the Australian Cattle Dog, Australian Kelpie, Stumpy Tail Cattle Dog, Australian Terrier and Australian Silky Terrier. This site includes guidance on the controversial subject of tail-docking, a "Why does my dog do that?" section, grooming and coat-care and a link to the not-very-Australian Official Old English Sheepdog page.

↑ RareBreed Network

www.rarebreed.com

A centralised information source for rare dog breeds and information on kennels, clubs, breed standards and shows. But don't get the idea that it's all about weird mutts — there are some handsome fellows here. The network is growing rapidly and hopes soon to include breed standards, a directory and events calendar. The rare breeds themselves include everything from the Appenzeller Mountain Dog to the Blackmouth Cur, the Transylvanian Hound and the tongue-twisting Xoloitzcuintli.

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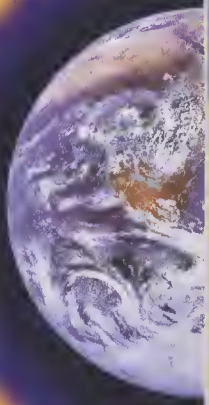

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Rin Tin Tin

www.mdle.com/ClassicFilms/FeaturedStar/star48.htm

Rin Tin Tin's story — and not any interactive qualities — makes this site hot. Rinty's debut was The Man From Hell's River in 1922. Soon earning $1,000 a week, he had his own limousine, chauffeur, orchestra, diamond collar and chateaubriand steak prepared by his own chef. In 1918, US airmen scouting the French countryside stumbled on an enemy dog station containing a German Shepherd with pups. A corporal took care of them and, when discharged, transported two pups to the States; naming one Rin Tin Tin after the charms carried by French soldiers.

Petnet's Dog Lovers' Page

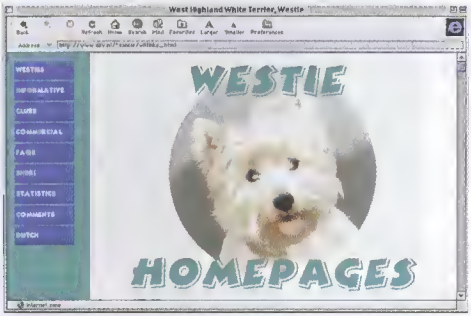
www.petnet.com.au/dogs/introdog.html

One of the interesting facts you'll learn at this site is that pet owners are at a lower risk of heart attack, having lower cholesterol and lower blood pressure. It has a very useful Selectapet questionnaire to help you choose which breed of dog is right for you. You're not going to want a small happy breed to defend your property or a loud, mad pup if you live in a flat, so this section is useful. There's also a bevy of information on how to feed and care for you furry friend and advice on moving house with your pets.

The Afghan Hound

www.netrus.net/users/abc/

Afghan Hounds are as 60s as paisley cravats and The Easybeats. They look best on the lead of someone in a mini-skirt and a maxi coat with a furry trim. Or a woman, for that matter. The Afghan's the real aristocrat of the dog world, oozing dignity and aloofness. It's also a mean runner and, apparently, was bred for hunting big cats! Check out all those topknots, and the "somewhat exaggerated bend in the stifle due to profuse trouserings". You got a bit of that in the 60s.

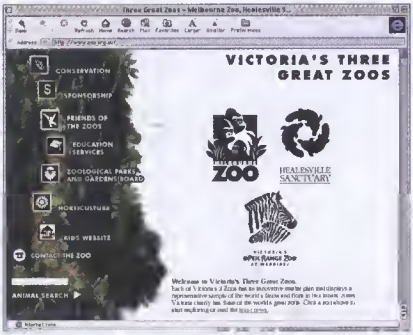


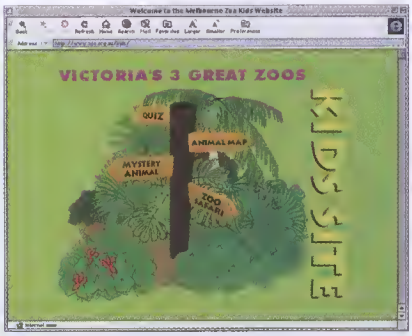
Web Westies

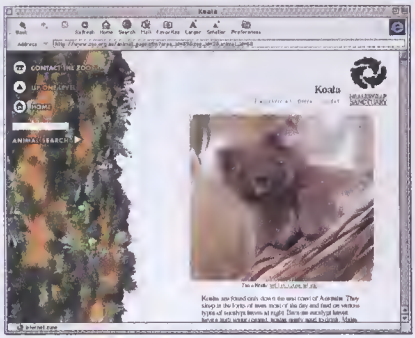
www.dsv.nl/~sannie/whlinks_.html

The West Highland White Terrier has to be the cutest, cheekiest breed of dog. It originates from Scottish Argyllshire — a little strange then that this site's in the Netherlands. The breed was first introduced at a 1900 dog show as the Poltalloch Terrier — wisely changed in 1907 to the West Highland White Terrier. They love digging holes and were once used for hunting foxes, otters and badgers. Being white made them stand out — unless it was snowing, when presumably you got your black Scottish Terriers out hunting.

SITE OF THE MONTH







Melbourne's Three Great Zoos

www.zoo.org.au

This site has to be the next best thing to actually visiting the zoo. For anyone who loves animals, this offering is a nirvana of information. The site is the initiative of Victoria's three zoos — Melbourne, Healesville Sanctuary and Werribee's Open Plain Zoo. The three have banded together for a combined online presence and the result is a menagerie of information on each of the zoos and their residents.

Start at the top and check out what the three zoos are doing in areas like conservation and horticulture. Then you can click straight through to one of the three zoos to find out about the animals that live there. What we especially like about this site is the way that the animals are grouped under their natural habitat. This means that when you're finding out about the Mandrill or the Pygmy Hippo, you also find out about their natural environment as well as the animals they share it with.

If you like looking at pretty pictures of animals, this offering is a must with its full colour photos of everything from the koala to the green tree frog. If you find a pic you especially like you can send it as a postcard.

For the kids, there's a school project friendly information section on various residents of the three zoos, with links to the main site, should more detailed information be required. Kids can also take the interactive zoo safari, which gives easily digestible chunks of interesting info about various animals.

If you have an animal-related school project, love animals or want to organise a visit to one of Victoria's zoos, you should find all the answers here.

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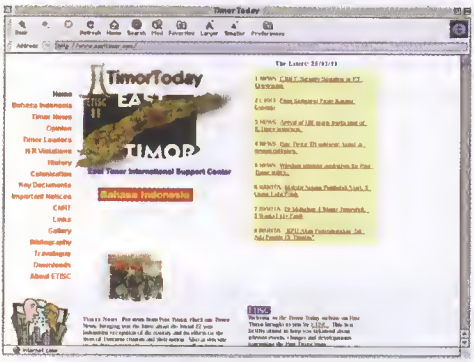
SITEWATCH

Daniel Fallon takes a close-up look at East Timor as it brawls towards independence...

>East Timor on the brink



↑ Timor Today

www.easttimor.com

This e-zine provides plenty of regularly updated news to keep you in the loop with regards the situation in East Timor. It actually gathers a collection of news stories from the big agencies and publications, such as AFP, The South China Morning Post, AP, Reuters, ANTARA and The Sunday Tribune, which makes it very handy stop for picking through a wide variety of news resources covering the situation. Most of the articles included at the site offer a critical view of the Indonesia government's stance on East Timor. You can read about the Timorese leaders, such as Xanana Gusmao and Nobel Peace Prize Winner Bishop Belo, view a disturbing photo gallery on human rights violations, and read about the colonial history of the region since 1974 here too. There is also a collection of opinions from a number of columnists as well. Timor Today is a well put together e-zine for those concerned with human rights.

East Timor Human Rights Centre

www.gn.apc.org/ethrc/

This Melbourne-based group features reports of human rights abuses in East Timor, information on missing people, a gruesome selection of photos of people who are (or have been) the victims of torture and a section on events related to the Human Rights Centre. A word of warning — some of the pictures available are graphic and could shock or even offend. It seems both horrifying and sad that these practises go on, day in, day out. This site's not for the faint-hearted.

Indonesian Department of Foreign Affairs

www.dfa-deplu.go.id

This Indonesian government department has had its work cut out for it since it annexed East Timor in 1975. This site is designed to provide you with the basics on Indonesia's foreign affairs policies, which have changed significantly in the last 12 months as the Republic looks to set East Timor on the road to autonomy. The news section provides reports from Indonesian and some foreign news sources. In the 'new information' section of the site you can read about the dealings of the Indonesian government with its neighbours — there's plenty of interaction with Australia as proposals for an international peace-keeping force are being discussed. You can also read about Indonesia's position on human rights and East Timor as well as section responding to the commentary of foreign media.

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Radio New Zealand (**www.rnz.co.nz**) RP
NZ NetNews (**nznetnews.co.nz**) RP
Audio Books — nonfiction (**broadcast.com/books/NonFiction/**) RP
Audio Books — fiction (**broadcast.com/books/Fiction/**) RP

Australia scheduled shows

DAILY, ABC NewsRadio Stock Market Report (**abc.net.au/newsradio/finance.htm**). Updated each weekday afternoon. MP RP
TUES, 2.15pm In Conversation with Shane Mahony (**abc.net.au/rural/conversation/**). Weekly chat with rural leaders plus archived chats. RP MP
APR 30, 10am Australian Science Festival (**www.sciencefestival.com**). ??

International scheduled shows

DAILY, 4AM: Financail Times Business Times (**www.ft-television.com/today/audio/ftbt.htm**), European Business roundup RP
MON, 12PM to 2PM: The Single Connection (**www.broadcast.com/lightsource/live/single/**). Ben Young hosts a radio talk show for singles. RP
TUE-FRI, 5PM: Comedy Central (**www.comedycentral.com/dailyshow/**), a daily show from the team behind shows like South Park RP
SUN, 8AM: Boot Scoot'n Party'n Nights (**www.broadcast.com/premrad/shows/bootscoot/**) NS

Concerts

APR 16th, 10am: Michel Camilo (**bluenote.net**) RP
APR 23rd, 10am: Danilo Perez (**bluenote.net**) RP
APR 23rd, 12.30pm: The Freshmaker Tour The Cotton Club, Atlanta (**www.mento.com**). RP
APR 25th, 12.30PM: Jazz is Dead (**www.liveconcerts.com**). RP
MAY 22nd: The Freshmaker Tour Cleveland (**www.mentos.com**). RP

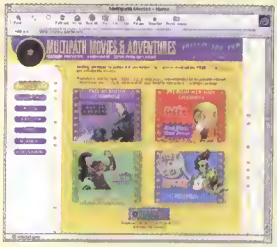
* ALL DATES AND TIMESSUBJECT TO CHANGE

MOVIE OF THE MONTH

Multipath Movies

>> **www.bde3d.com**

This may be a US hosted site, but most of the development happens here in Australia. See some great streaming cartoons include Popeye, Ace Ventura and Xena, Warrior Princess. There are some top mini-movies you can watch for free, or subscribe to the service and get full length movies online. The coolest part is these movies are interactive so you choose what happens next. Pretty neat, but it only took us a few minutes to kill off the Warrior Princess. MPM



Sites to Watch

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www.when.com
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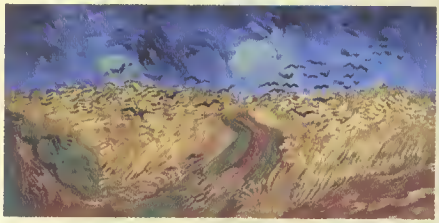
www.pluggedin.com
events.yahoo.com
www.timecast.com
www.jamtv.com
www.itvideov.co.nz
www.ttalk.com
www.real.com
www.wilma.com
www.melbourne.net/livegigs/

ONLINE EXHIBITION

Van Gogh's Van Gogh

>> **www.artmuseum.net**

Enjoy a fully immersive and freely navigable 3-dimensional recreation of the Van Gogh's Van Goghs exhibition as it appeared last year at the National Gallery of Art in Washington. Visitors can zoom into the details of paintings and browse the gallery as it was. RP LP



RP RealPlayer
NS MS Netshow
?? Unknown
WAV .wav files
MP Windows Media Player
MPM Multipath Media Player
LP Live Picture

MUSIC OF THE MONTH

Hanson Online

>> **www.hansonline.com**

Scoff as much as you like, but Hanson is big, especially amongst the young female sect on the Internet. So popular in fact that this official site ranks in the Top 10 of the 100 hot music sites online (**www.100hot.com/music/**). The site links to the official fan chat channel at Yahoo!, plus you can buy merchandise and hum along with the lyrics and sound clips from albums and live concerts. Hot for now, but wait until puberty sets in. WAV

Holding a live online event? Let us know well in advance by emailing **live@netguide.aust.com**

Break down the walls

Marc Phillips explains the barriers which are slowing down consumers from getting connected

REPORTS FROM THE US indicate that as many as 55% of all American adults used the Internet at least once in the past year. Meanwhile, a March 1999 Australian Bureau of Statistics (**www.abs.gov.au**) report estimates that 31% of Australians used the Internet last year. Both numbers show a considerable rise on the previous year's figures. The ABS figures also show that during 1998, the number of Australian households with Internet access climbed 49% to 19% of all households.

These numbers reflect the maturity of the Internet. In the US, the technology is now well and truly entrenched in the mainstream. In fact, some researchers believe the US market is approaching saturation. British-based researcher Ovum (**www.ovum.com**) expects the US market to be saturated by 2002, with future growth coming from the rest of the world.

It's worth looking at why the rest of the world lags behind the US, particularly when many Australian companies look to the Internet as the mechanism for international expansion and exports of their goods and services. The explanation is that there are far fewer barriers between US end-users and the Internet than exist elsewhere.

Take, for example, the cost of using the Net. In metropolitan Australia, you need a decent computer, a modem and a phone line to get online. An Internet-ready computer will cost a minimum of $2,000. Add another $200 for a modem. We're not talking about state-of-the-art hardware; we're talking about enough gear to have a decent Internet experience. For the average Australian home user, this costs almost one month's salary.

American's can buy Internet ready computers for under US$1,000. Generally that price would include a 56K modem. Americans also earn more than Australians and pay less tax. The bottom line is that for a typical US worker, an Internet ready system represents about seven or eight day's income. So in relative terms, to an American worker the cost of buying computer hardware is about one third of the

cost to an Australian worker. No wonder relatively fewer Australian's are online.

When we look at other factors, our relative situation looks worse. Most large Internet providers sell an 'all-you-can-eat' package, which provides unlimited access for a fixed monthly fee. The biggest provider is AOL (**www.aol.com**). American AOL subscribers pay US$21.95 for unlimited access. Australian AOL (**www.aol.com.au**) subscribers pay 15 hours per month for $29.95, which doesn't compare favourably for any member surfing for longer than 15 hours. Other big name ISPs BigPond (**www.bigpond.com**) and OzEmail (**www.ozemail.com.au**) cater better for frequent users, costing around $45 for unlimited and $34.95 for 150 hours per month respectively, but this is still expensive compared to our northern cousins. At current, exchange rates that means US subscribers pay only two-thirds Australian rates.

Then there's the cost of dial-up access. Most people find a second telephone line is essential for access. This will typically cost around $12 a month for rental plus 25 cents for each call (that's not the same as each successful log-on). Someone who logs on daily might need to make as many as 72 calls a month at a cost of a further $18. Few US citizens will pay similar charges. Per call charges are not common in the US.

Other US services such as WebTV (**www.webtv.com**) not only bring the cost of Internet access down further, these services are also designed to appeal to non-technical users. Surfing with WebTV is about as difficult as switching TV channels and you don't need an expensive computer to use the service. Similar services in Australia are yet to have the same breakthrough here that WebTV has in the US.

So far we've looked at the city. In the bush it's worse. While some ISPs now serve rural Australia, the cost of access from remote areas is significantly higher than in the US. Australia's big ISPs typically cover 70% of the population. With one or two regional exceptions (particularly in Alaska) most rural Americans have Internet access at costs only slightly above city dwellers.

When you take all these costs into account, the absolute cost of Internet access in Australia is around twice the US cost. But the slice it takes out of an Australian's after tax income is higher again. Given this, it isn't hard to understand why we lag behind the US.

European access

On the positive side, our relative costs are considerably lower than in Europe. There, consumers generally have to pay for timed local calls. For example, in the UK British Telecom charges 4 pence per minute for a local call during the daytime. That's around 11 cents. Off peak calls are 1.5 pence and weekends are 1 pence per minute. So, a one-hour Internet session during the day will cost a British user around $7.50 for the call charge alone.

This explains why Australia Internet use is higher than in Britain. It also has an interesting effect on the way people use Internet services. Typically, they will log on, surf around collecting material to store on their hard disks and then log-off to view the pages offline. So don't expect to see too many Poms in online chat

> "...Internet access in Australia is around twice the US cost."

groups. A side effect of this is that British ISPs don't tend to impose time limits on their customers.

Most significantly, the European practice of imposing local call charges makes nonsense of e-commerce. While Europeans do buy online from international sites, they are far less inclined to buy online than Americans or Australians, mainly because they count the minutes spent on e-commerce transactions as part of the final purchase price. Another point about the cost of access is that it makes consumers less willing to pay for value-added online services like electronic publication subscriptions or game playing services.

We could also make comparisons between Australian and US prices for higher-bandwidth access. We could, but there's not a lot of point. Australian providers charge so much for higher bandwidth access that hardly any domestic Internet users bother to use these services. Some American's surf the Web using cable modems and ADSL technology for considerably less than we pay for dial-up access.

Technically this bandwidth gap isn't a barrier to entry. But because Americans have higher bandwidth, they can use more sophisticated Internet applications such as video-conferencing or high quality streamed audio. Their higher bandwidth means they enjoy a better Internet experience and are more likely to make better use of the Internet. You might be more inclined to use services such as online Yellow Pages (**www.yellowpages.com.au**) if you could find what you want in seconds rather than minutes. With 28.8K modem access, using the old fashioned books can be much quicker.

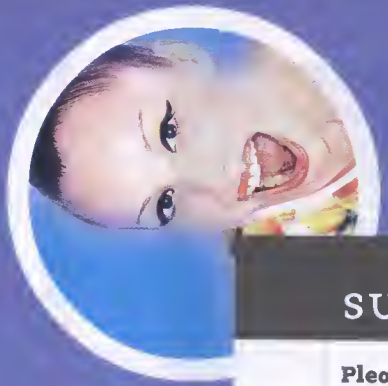
Other barriers to entry are less obvious. Take, for instance, the way ISPs charge for their services. Most Australian ISPs prefer customers who pay by credit card. From their point of view it makes sense. ISPs don't have to worry about the credit worthiness of credit card customers; collecting money is safe, easy and relatively cheap. Many people prefer not to use credit cards because they find them too much of a temptation or too expensive. Others are not allowed to own cards because they are too young or don't earn enough. If an ISP only allows users to pay via credit card, it is creating another barrier to potential customers.

Breaking barriers

Internationally the barriers to Internet access are coming down. In the UK, most Internet users have free ISP accounts sponsored by supermarkets (e.g. **www.tesco.co.uk**), electrical appliance retailers (e.g. **www.dixons.co.uk**) and other organisations such as **www.virgin.net**. Support is provided using a 50 pence per minute phone service – that's around $1 per minute. Some US companies are drawing eyeballs to their clients' advertising by giving away computers. Internet kiosks in shopping malls provide pay-by-the-minute access for those who don't have home access. Libraries and other public institutions are installing basic access services for poorer people. Satellite communications can now deliver high bandwidth communications to rural users for costs that compare favourably with those in major cities. Innovative technologies are being used to bypass telephone companies control over data links to residential areas.

If we're going to live in a wired society, the next few years will need to see many more innovative ways of providing more affordable access to an ever-wider group of people. The rate at which Australian-based e-commerce grows depends on it.

Marc Phillips can be contacted at ***neted@netguide.aust.com***



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all that jazz

Daniel Fallon chats with jazz legend James Morrison about the world's biggest jam session

MOST PEOPLE KNOW James Morrison as one of Australia's best jazz musicians. Famous for his trumpet playing, James is also a talented multi-instrumentalist, playing everything from piano to alto saxophone both live and when recording. Recently, he has turned his attention to another love — the Internet — to help promote his music and start new jazz talent on the path to success. After launching a site for his own bands at **www.jamesmorrison.com.au** — which range from the Quintet, which features promising vocalist Emma Pask, to the Big Band — as well as a site for his new record independent record label, Morrison Records (**www.morrisonrecords.com.au**), the top entertainer is well positioned to reap the rewards of a new era in music.

What has been the response to the James Morrison site?

Morrison: It's been great. Amongst other things, we've ended up doing some good business there through CD sales and we've actually booked gigs through there, but what's amazing is that we've actually never spoken to anyone — that's a new experience. Apart from that, one of the really big things about it is the huge response from musicians, particularly young musicians, from all over the world on the [chat] forums, just answering their questions [via email] and talking to them, and all sorts of great things with fans writing in. [There's] more a feeling of being connected to the people that are listening to your music, whether that be by CD or live. A lot of messages come the day after a concert. It sort of plugs you into the rest of the world.

We get a lot of overseas traffic... and people are using it as a gig guide. The guest book is great — heaps of people come through and sign there and leave messages. The Ask James Forum is huge. I am just trying to work out how I'm going to keep up with it, because I do sit down and answer them personally.

With the new MP4 format, which allows CD quality audio files to be compressed and

downloaded quickly, coming along, do you think the traditional record company will lose its power?

I think its role will change. It would be wishful thinking for small labels and people like me to think 'one day the record companies won't exist'. They're too savvy for that. I think they should be way ahead of the game, and they're not, but they'll catch up... They'll still be the big record companies, but sure, everyone is going to buy their music that way. Why on earth would you want to go down the street and buy a piece of plastic with one's and zero's on it and bring it back home, when one's and zero's come screaming down the line into your house anyway? That's really what it's about. And the artwork looks much better on a 17-inch screen than it does on a CD. Everyone's been lamenting the loss of the LP, because the artwork looked so good, nice and big. We'll it's back, in living colour. And the thing they haven't even explored yet, is album covers that move. The album cover doesn't have to be a static shot any more. People aren't thinking outside the square. When you buy the next James Morrison MP4 file on the Net, the album cover moves... and all these types of ideas. I think it will be a whole new world. We think it's pretty hip today, that people click on a button and it bills their credit card and [the CD] is sent to them, but it still takes however long the mail takes to get to them. People don't understand. They think they're buying the CD — the CD is worth about 80 cents. The MP4 track on the site is the full track. It's a sample for people to try out MP4 and get the idea they don't need the right player, it comes with it — the player is embedded.

You've got an online jam session coming up. What's that about?

We figured this is a way for everyone to hook up in real time and play. It will be great fun, because we'll stream the audio out from the studio and meanwhile... we'll talk to them, play, they can jam along and we'll have spaces in there where they take a solo, and they should record it at their end and email us the sound or send it on a cassette, if they want. We'll have a competition with that.

I think it's fun to think they'll be all these people in the world playing together at the same time. What we do prior to it is publish the music on the Web site, the chords and the melody, and say 'here it all is, practice, the jam is in two weeks'. When it comes, everyone will either have their music on screen or will have printed it out and be ready to go and if Joe Bloggs does a particular thing that I can make an example of, then I can say, 'do you mind if I tell everyone else', then I can put a little snippet — say eight bars — and say here's why I told him this. I can use it as a sort of music clinic worldwide.

Why have you gone it alone and set up the independent Morrison Records?

You have the freedom to trial new ideas... My brother John and I really always said one day we'll have a record label, because the biggest difference is not so much what I can do, but that I can record other people. So now we can spot the talent... we've also recently signed Don Burrows, which is a great coup for us. You can't get more established in the jazz scene than Don. His record will be out in about three weeks. After that the next release will be a new artist that we'll introduce.

Will you distribute these albums Online?

The Internet [distribution] will gradually take over. At the moment we're going to sort of do 10% on the Net and 90% in the stores... but I think it will all of a sudden go to 90% through the Net when everyone wakes up and sees it's a better way of doing it.

TECH SUPPORT>>

The month's tech support is brought to you from the team at NetGuide. It covers everything from printer problems, to transferring bookmarks from Netscape browsers to Microsoft's Internet Explorer, to attaching pictures in Outlook email. To read further frequently asked questions, head for our Web site at **www.netguide.au.com**.

Some pages on the Web say things like "click here to enter our secure site". I'm curious, but I don't want to spend money without knowing it. How do I know if visiting these sites costs me money?

Shopping on the Web is like shopping anywhere – it costs nothing to look. Internet shopping will only cost you money if you actually order something and supply your credit card details (aside, of course, from what you pay your Internet Service Provider (ISP) to be online). If you're not tempted, hit your browser's Back button to leave the secure site.

Incidentally, it's not recommended to give your credit card details to a site which isn't secure. Your browser has a few ways to tell you when you're in a secure site – Netscape has an unbroken key at the bottom of the screen (on an insecure site the key has a line through it), while Internet Explorer (IE) shows a small closed padlock icon on secure sites.

I just tried printing a short Web page and the top, left and middle of the page all came out on separate pieces of paper. What happened?

You're probably looking at a site which uses frames. Frames are commonly used to divide your browser window for things like navigation buttons – the buttons stay visible while the main part of the window changes. To print the page exactly how you see it on your screen, choose Print from the file menu (not the Print button on the browser's toolbar) and check the Print dialog box for a section headed "Print frames". Select "As laid out on screen" to print the page as you see it. If you just want to print one section of a framed page, click your right mouse button (Mac users click and hold) in the frame you want and choose Print from the menu. "Only the selected frame" should already be selected in the "Print frames" section of the dialog. Click OK to print your chosen frame.

How can I transfer Netscape bookmarks to Explorer?

In many cases, installing the new browser will also bring your bookmarks into IE's Favorites file. If you do have to do it yourself, the task is made fairly easy because Netscape bookmarks are stored in a normal HTML file, just like a Web page.

PC users, choose "Find/Files or folders" from your Windows Start menu and enter "bookmark.htm" in the Named: field. Make sure you're looking in your C: drive and that "Include subfolders" is ticked. Then click Find Now. The file you're looking for is probably in **C:\Program Files\Netscape\Communicator\Program\Defaults**. When you've found it, double-click it to load it into Internet Explorer. Next, either

choose Add to Favorites from IE's Favorites menu or drag the page icon from the Address box to your Links bar. You'll now be able to call up a page of links to your old bookmarks any time you like.

Is there a way to change the icons in the links bar to something recognisable to me?

To add existing Favorites to the Links bar, choose Favorites/Organize Favorites and drag sites into the Links folder. To add a new site directly to the Links bar, drag the "e" icon from the Address bar onto the Links bar.

To change a newly-added URL's icon, right-click the icon you want to change and choose Properties. On the Internet Shortcut tab, click Change Icon, and then Browse to search for a new icon (the default file containing these icons is **url.dll**, but try **shell32.dll** in your **C:\Windows\System** folder for a wider choice). When you locate an icon, select it and click OK. Back in the Properties dialog, click OK to apply the new icon.

Is there a way in Outlook Express to block messages from certain addresses?

You can set up Outlook Express to automatically delete messages from an address you assign. Let's say you often get unwanted mail from **weirdo@wacko.com.au**. You tell them to stop sending you the mail, but it never stops. Open Outlook Express and choose Tools/Inbox Assistant. When the Inbox Assistant opens, click Add, then click the From entry box and type in **weirdo@wacko.com.au**.

Select the check box labelled Move To and then click Folder. Select Deleted Items and click OK. Click OK again to get back to Inbox Assistant. Your new description will read "If 'From' contains **weirdo@wacko.com.au** then move to Deleted Items". Click OK to accept this condition and close the dialog. From now on, all mail from **weirdo@wacko.com.au** will be deleted automatically.

How do I include pictures in an Outlook Express message?

You can't insert pictures into a text-only message, so you first must tell Outlook Express to send the message in HTML format. Choose Tools/Options then click the Send tab. Select HTML in the Mail Sending Format section. Click OK to close the dialog box.

Click Compose Message and enter a recipient and a subject. Next, click in the message body and choose Insert/Picture. In the Picture dialog box, click Browse and locate the picture you want to use. Click OK to close the dialog box and save your selection.

Complete your message and send, but be aware that some recipients may not be able to read mail in HTML format.

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continued from overleaf →

community. It was taken aback by the recent announcements by Alston's office and AIIA's chairperson Patrick Fair criticised the scheme as impractical. If ISPs were to act as gateways for overseas content, it would be like putting a tollway on the Internet, causing every site to slow down and be checked before entering the country, he says.

However, the government is not proposing that ISPs filter overseas content. Under its current model, surfers who see highly offensive and illegal content will be able to report the site via a hotline. The ABA would pass the information on to the relevant police authority for their referral to relevant overseas enforcement bodies. This won't slow the Net, and there is a moral obligation to take action against evidence of criminal activity, be it paedophilia or worse. One area the government plan hasn't covered as far as we're aware, is that of private hosting companies, where a significant number of sites are accessible to the public. They too would have to come under the watchful eye of the ABA for this model to cover sites nationwide.

EFA says the government proposal sets the censorship debate back three years, pushing the line that most of the porn content comes from overseas. Other countries that have tried to stop porn through the use of proxies have failed, such as Malaysia, according to the EFA. It is calling for an open public debate and appears worried at the speed at which the government is looking to implement its plan.

The question of whether the Internet can be regulated by government law seems to be a recurring issue, not just in our experience but across the world. A former Web master of the US Playboy magazine once told me it was impossible for governments to regulate the Net. The sheer nature of the network, made up of routers, cables, servers, wires and ISPs, makes it extremely difficult to block content. It truly is a World Wide Web that provides content across borders.

Anti-censorship advocates, such as EFA, believe the ability for almost anyone to publish material is its greatest strength, offering the ideal of free speech to the widest public possible. But people shouldn't be able to make available and even promote material that is illegal for children in other forms of media.

Censorship is an age-old debate and one not likely to go away. The point the government is making is that the same standards in the offline world should apply to the Internet. But until it convinces the Internet industry that its plans are feasible, Tropical Cyclone Alston is likely to rage on. ●

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BY DANIEL FALLON

Tropical Cyclone Alston

THE STORM BREWING OVER the government's recent proposal for a new model of regulating the Internet is shaping up to be another tropical cyclone Vance. The winds of opposition are already building in the Internet industry, and this weather station would like to warn you to stay indoors and monitor the situation from the comfort of your home (perhaps in the bathroom, if you're the Minister for Communications and the Arts). Senator Alston has intensified efforts to clean the Internet up and make it a safer place for businesses to do business, seniors to stay in touch and children to play in the cyber sand. It's an ideal most of us long for wistfully, especially when we're barraged by graphic email attachments from spruiking spammers. However, many believe the ideal is just that — a dream.

The master plan

Under the government's current proposal, Internet Service Providers (ISP) will act as the gatekeepers for content they are hosting. They will be the ones pulling the plug on sites that offer porn or other content deemed offensive. The Australian Broadcasting Authority (**www.aba.gov.au**) will become a watchdog for the new laws, listening to complaints from surfers and instructing service providers to remove or block offensive content on their servers. Adult content will be given a rating, such as X or R, much like it is in the video and film industries. These sites will have to provide adult verification mechanisms, such as credit card or pin number functionality, to stop youngsters from accessing them. The government has said that ISPs won't be legally responsible for the porn material, but they will be obliged to remove 'highly offensive or illegal material' once their services have been notified of the existence of the material. Fines may be issued for those who ignore ABA instructions. The government will also establish a body representing the community and industry to monitor online material, receive complaints about offensive material from the public and educate surfers about possible solutions such as filtering software. That on its own is a reasonable idea, which should go ahead without much fuss. The ABA already has a useful families guide at its site, with information on how to keep children safe. However, the practicality of the 'ISP gatekeeper' model is questionable, especially if it doesn't receive the support of the industry.

Industry backlash

At this stage the response has been anything but positive, with some putting down the governments move down to political expediency. Strong opposition has come from two prominent industry groups — the Australian Internet Industry Association (**www.aiia.com.au**) and vocal anti-censorship organisation, Electronic Frontiers Australia (**www.efa.org.au**). The AIIA had been working with the government on a more flexible arrangement towards ensuring Net content was acceptable to the

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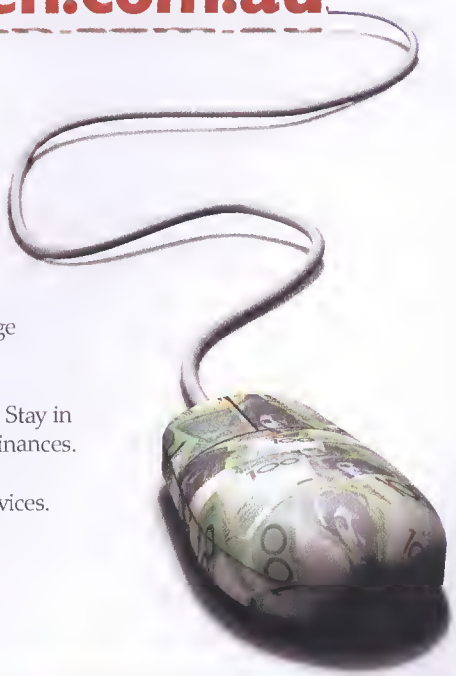

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